THE PRINCESS
ZOUBAROFF

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THE PRINCESS ZOUBAROFF

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LONDON: GRANT RICHARDS LIMITED 1920

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THE PRINCESS ZOUBAROFF

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Adrian Sheil-Meyer
Eric Tresilian
Lord Orkish
Monsignor Vanhove
Reggie Quintus
Angelo
Nadine Sheil-Meyer
Enid Tresilian
Lady Rocktower
Glyda, *her daughter*
Marchesa Pitti-Conti
Dante Silvio Paolao, *her son*
Mrs Negress
Mrs Mangrove
Princess Zoubaroff

ACT I

Scene I

Florence. Early summer. The garden of the Casa Meyer. Oleanders, giant Ilex, Judas-trees, flowering hibiscus. A few long green palms. In their blue shade a peacock or two. A pillared circle of Bougainvillæa-wreathed arches supporting a hammock R. *through which a portion of the house can be seen. Within the circle, a faded-marble statue, representing an effigy of the Virgin Mary, and a miscellaneous array of easy-chairs, two or three, and a portable table holding magazines and books, extending down. A rustic arch* L. *leading to roadway. Distant prospect, Florence. Time, afternoon.*

ADRIAN, ERIC

ERIC. Where are they?

ADRIAN. Nadine and Enid have gone hunting together.

ERIC. Hunting?

ADRIAN. For Antiques.

ERIC. Poking round for Antiques—and we've been barely married a week. (ADRIAN *shrugs.*) Our marriage is *manqué*!

ADRIAN. This little jaunt of ours ought to clear the air.

ERIC. Do you know, I believe Enid would be positively glad if I didn't return to her again?

ADRIAN. She seemed quite bright at lunch.

ERIC. Precisely.

ADRIAN (*laughing*). Between ourselves, I begin to fear we've both made mistakes!

ERIC. I'm glad you can laugh.

ADRIAN. I can't help it.

ERIC. Thank goodness we shall start to-morrow without them.

ADRIAN. Yes. Nadine loathes the Engadine. Mountains depress her nature.

ERIC. Do all mountains?

ADRIAN. Anything she can't see over.

ERIC. Their rarefied atmosphere braces me. I'm never so well as in it.

ADRIAN. It can be had, as well, at home. (*Picking up a book, which he scans.*) "She read romances night and day, and wished to live them, after the fashion of the shepherds of Astrea; she slept upon a sofa painted like grass, and in a room representing trees and sheepfolds; and when the Beloved arrived, she would softly recite the *Eclogues of Fontanelle*, would talk of tender flames the sensitive heart, and dish up all the mawkishness of the Operas."

ERIC. Princess Zoubaroff has been lending *mia moglie* some books.

ADRIAN. One's inclined to be diffident of her influence!

ERIC. Her heart's desire now, I'm told, is to make her Peace with heaven.

ADRIAN. I know of nothing more dangerous; but I can scarcely believe it.

ERIC. One hears strange stories of her—Rumours, in fact.

ADRIAN. She fascinates Nadine and Enid! And here they are.

SCENE 2

Same. NADINE SHEIL-MEYER *loaded with bric-à-brac.* ENID TRESILIAN. *Both are ultra beautifully dressed.* MRS SHEIL-MEYER'S *hat is one mass of quivering grasses.*

NADINE. Don't bother.

ENID (*Airily helping her*). An imaginary footman helps.

ADRIAN. What have you been getting?

ENID. Such enthralling things.

ERIC. Let's see.

NADINE. No, no, no, no.

ADRIAN. Peevish!

ENID. She is fagged, I fear, by our expedition.

NADINE (*indignantly*). I'm not.

ENID. We've been to Ishmael Levy!

ADRIAN. Ah! Beware of fakes.

ENID (*superiorly*). He offered us a *Lucia bearing her Eyes upon a Dish*—a supposed original of

Masaccio, and a fantastic Moreau like some strong perfume.

ADRIAN. He did?

ENID. A head and hands business.

ADRIAN. Oh?

ENID. And who should there enter as we were glancing round *but Blanche*!

ERIC. Blanche?

ENID. Blanche Negress.

ERIC. Who's she?

ENID. . . . But so charming and so different to the rest!

ERIC. Then she *must* be refreshing.

NADINE. What induced you to ask her here this evening, Enid, by the way?

ENID. Because I thought it might be fun. You know she writes things for the papers.

ADRIAN. What sort of things?

ENID. Oh, don't ask me what sort of things.

NADINE (*throwing her purchases down upon a table*). She was telling us at the Bretagne they charge her more to board her Great-Dane than they do for her maid.

ERIC. Perhaps it eats more!

NADINE. Talking of eating—do you wish for a collation at daybreak before you start?

ADRIAN. No, thanks.

ENID. You're packed?

ERIC. Not quite.

ENID. Could I do anything?

ERIC. It's good of you, dear, but there's practically nothing to do.

NADINE (*inquisitively*). I suppose you're feeling pleasurably excited at the thoughts of to-morrow?

ERIC. Why not?

ENID. Remember, won't you, Eric, to gather a little Eidelweiss if you should notice any.

NADINE. Yes; don't forget that.

ENID. Though no accidents, mind.

NADINE. Naturally.

ERIC (*nettled, his anger rising*). Say out straight what you mean, can't you?

ENID. What I mean?

ERIC. I don't go in for *arrière pensées*.

ENID. Really, Eric, your hypersensitiveness would try an archangel, I think.

ERIC. Oh! Would it?

NADINE (*disdainfully*). Poor child, don't mind him! One knows his bow-wow ways.

ENID. I'll not be long, dear (*kissing her finger-tips to her*). I've a very little letter I must write.

NADINE. Must you?

ENID (*moving towards house*). Just a few hurried flying lines. . . .

ERIC (*following her*). And I've some business too! . . .

Scene 3

ADRIAN, NADINE (their *Married* voices)

NADINE. I could laugh when I think of her answering congratulatory letters still!

ADRIAN. She's having rather a pale sort of honeymoon apparently.

NADINE. If she's neglected, whose fault is it?

ADRIAN. You surely don't think it's mine!

NADINE. I do.

ADRIAN (*ominously*). You dare to say that?

NADINE (*with intention*). Don't let's repeat Egypt!

ADRIAN (*shuddering*). Not for the universe.

NADINE. He'd better look out. She's just in the mood for fireworks.

ADRIAN. Is she?—the deuce.

NADINE. I know Enid better than Eric. (*Mysteriously.*) She and I were at school together.

ADRIAN. What possessed you to ask her here for her honeymoon?

NADINE (*Sentimentally staring at the tip of her shoe*). Because—I don't know!—I wished to lend her a little support. . . . Chaperone her, so to speak, the difficult first days. Poor darling. She had nobody. She was very unhappy at home.

ADRIAN (*blatantly*). Eric and I—we too were at school together.

NADINE. Bah! Don't talk to me of Eric.

ADRIAN. He was my friend.

NADINE. What do *I* care?

ADRIAN. You tiresome woman.

NADINE. How dare you call me "tiresome"?

ENID (*returning*). Excuse me, Nadine, but what is Charlotte's address?

NADINE. Coombe-Court, Straithfieldsaye.

ENID. And Elise?

NADINE. Five Rue Sganarelle. . . .

ENID. Oh, thank you, dear. (*She goes in.*)

NADINE. I can't *bear* to see her look so bored.

ADRIAN. Bored!

NADINE. Poor little soul. It makes one weep to look at her.

ADRIAN. I never saw anyone so . . . (*Looking.*)

NADINE. What?

ADRIAN. Nothing.

NADINE (*putting up her sunshade*). I believe you were going to insult her!

ADRIAN (*horror-struck*). I?

NADINE (*in indignant yet not displeased tones*). I fancy you were about to say something unkind.

ADRIAN (*pointedly*). Oh, that I leave to your Florentine friends!

NADINE. To whom do you refer?

ADRIAN (*lighting a cigarette*). I refer to Lord Orkish. . . .

NADINE. Ah!

ADRIAN. And to Mrs du Wilson. . . .

NADINE. Oh!

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ADRIAN. And to Zena Zoubaroff.

NADINE. Zena? But Zena *adores* Enid.

ADRIAN. Rot!

NADINE. She adores her.

(*The garden gate opens and the* PRINCESS ZOUBAROFF, *a very pale, vaguely "sinister-looking" woman of about thirty-five, enters. She wears a riding-habit, rather Vanloo, fringed with sables. In lieu of a riding-crop she holds a fan.*)

PRINCESS. I just looked in to say Good-bye!

SCENE 4

ADRIAN, NADINE, PRINCESS

ADRIAN (*gallantly*). What a charming surprise!

NADINE. We were this moment speaking of you, dear!

PRINCESS (*coming forward*). Of me? Oh? . . . And what were you saying of me?

NADINE. I was telling Adrian how fond of Enid you seemed.

PRINCESS. How could one help loving her?

ADRIAN (*solicitously*). Well? And what have *you* been doing?

PRINCESS (*glowing*). I'm just back from oh, such a heavenly ride. Half-way to Vallombrosa!

NADINE. But wasn't it grilling?

ADRIAN (*matter of fact*). We may expect a storm before morning, I think.

PRINCESS (*drawing off her gloves*). Rain is needed badly.

NADINE. It would do the young vines good.

ADRIAN. And the garden too. . . .

PRINCESS. Yours is a Paradise. . . . Those purple, tragic roses. . . . Tell me, how are they named?

ADRIAN. I forget.

PRINCESS (*poetically*). I love the Flowers. They talk to me. I love the Birds. They sing to me!

NADINE. What have they told you—if it's not indiscreet?

PRINCESS (*elusively*). They say that Opera-cloaks this Spring are going to make one seven good feet across the shoulders.

NADINE. Ah?

PRINCESS. And that sandals shortly are coming in. . . .

NADINE. What else?

PRINCESS (*stooping*). Let me admire your heliotropes.

ADRIAN (*flatteringly*). Your own garden, Princess, you know, is all our envy.

PRINCESS (*sighing*). This year I'm very vain of my pomegranates!

ADRIAN. I don't wonder.

PRINCESS. My beloved garden. You should see it early, at break of day, when Dawn makes its white holes through the trees.'

NADINE (*succinctly*). Perhaps to-morrow they will.

PRINCESS. And so you're really off?

ADRIAN. Yes.

PRINCESS. To those ridiculous mountains?

ADRIAN. Why do you say ridiculous?

PRINCESS. Aren't they?

ADRIAN. Not that I'm aware of.

PRINCESS. I am always disappointed with mountains. There are no mountains in the world as high as I could wish.

ADRIAN. No?

PRINCESS. They irritate me invariably. I should like to shake Switzerland. (*Looks at her hands.*)

NADINE. You have the perfectest hands, Zena.

PRINCESS (*wistfully*). Have I?

NADINE. You know you have.

PRINCESS. How Ingres admired my hands. He quite worshipped my little fingers.

SCENE 5

Same. ENID

ENID. I can't write letters while Eric is fidgeting about.

NADINE (*whispering*). Wait till we're Alone to-morrow.

ENID. Yes. I think so. Oh, Zena! (*Goes to her.*)

PRINCESS (*regarding her with pensive interest*). You look done-in, dear ; totally done-in.

ENID. Do I ?

PRINCESS. Those great fatigued eyes. . . .

NADINE. She does far too much ! Last night she was chasing bats after midnight with a long white rosary.

PRINCESS. Have you seen yet all the inevitable sights ?

ENID. Oh heavens, no. Beyond a few churches, I've seen nothing whatever.

PRINCESS. Really ?

ENID. Imagine, I haven't been at all to the Bargello.

PRINCESS. I was there one morning lately with one of the Hope girls.

ENID. Oh ?

PRINCESS. It was dreadful. She would *scream* at everything that attracted her, and fall upon her knees . . . and kiss and touch the things.

NADINE (*with decision*). I consider the eldest Miss Hope's a disgrace to England ! You see her woolgathering about the streets garbed in an old violet velvet sack, her hat set crooked, crammed with flowers.

PRINCESS. Yes ! And Tozhy too's a sight.

ENID. Tozhy ?

PRINCESS. Mr Hope—the "Father" of the English colony, you know.

ENID. Of course. He is going to show me some time where one can get Venetian glass !

PRINCESS (*Leaning on the back of a garden chair*). I have passed through all the fads, I suppose, myself in furniture and pictures and books. And now all I ask for's a cell. Give me a room with nothing in it!

ENID. How horribly *dull*.

ADRIAN. It must need courage to be so eclectic?

PRINCESS. Not really. (*With vivacity.*) I often think I would rather like to run a Convent.

ENID. Oh, Zena!

PRINCESS. For little girls—not for sour old women.

ADRIAN. Have you remarked the cosmopolitanised faces of the Nuns one meets hereabouts?

PRINCESS. No.

ADRIAN. It's so curious.

PRINCESS (*Beating the air dreamily with her fan*). Florence—I always say it's a place one drifts to in the end!

ADRIAN. It's a pity perhaps so many—what shall I say—people do.

PRINCESS (*with a swift, bright look*). I hear Reggie Quintus is in the town—looking quite lawless.

ADRIAN. Reggie?

NADINE. Oh!

PRINCESS. Lady Rocktower *saw* him.

NADINE. One would like to be kind to the boy on account of his poor darling mother—but it's a little difficult to, all the same.

PRINCESS (*critically*). He has the manners of one

who has nothing to lose and perhaps something to gain.

NADINE. Perhaps.

PRINCESS. He's so good-looking—too good-looking for a man.

ADRIAN. I don't intend ever having anything to do with him.

PRINCESS. No? Well, perhaps you're wise.

ENID (*looking towards house*). Why's Eric beckoning?

ADRIAN. I expect he wants his revenge at billiards!

NADINE (*sweetly*). Go to him, then, won't you, dear? Don't mind us!

ADRIAN. I will.

[*Exit* ADRIAN *to house.*

SCENE 6

PRINCESS, NADINE, ENID

ENID. This evening I feel so reckless, so reckless. I could wear a forehead-ornament besides a hat!

PRINCESS (*fingering*). Where did you get that love of a gown?

ENID. It was part of my *corbeille.*

PRINCESS. My dear, you have the instinct for dress. I never saw anything so perfect!

NADINE (*exclaiming*). Oh! . . .

ENID. Is there anything the matter?

NADINE. What have you done with your wedding-ring?

ENID. I took it off.

NADINE. What for?

ENID. I don't mean to wear one.

PRINCESS. But—my dear!

NADINE. Nonsense. You must!

ENID. Why?

NADINE. I insist.

ENID. Oh, of course if you're really keen . . .

PRINCESS. Where is it?

ENID. On the dressing-table in my room.

NADINE. I'll go and find it at once.

[*Exit* NADINE *to house.*

SCENE 7

PRINCESS, ENID

PRINCESS (*a short silence*). He has not been cruel?

ENID. No.

PRINCESS. You will make a fatal mistake, dear Enid, if you allow him to go!

ENID (*unconvinced*). Shall I?

PRINCESS. Remember the Foreign Colony here is a very hornet's nest. . . .

ENID. I can't help it!

PRINCESS (*putting an arm about her*). How are you with him?

ENID. Since lunch he and I are on tolerable terms again.

PRINCESS. Since lunch . . . ?

ENID. After all, it's really rather risible.

PRINCESS. I don't consider it risible in the *very* least.

ENID. Not ?

PRINCESS (*emphatic*). It's an unprecedented honeymoon—*even for Florence* !

ENID. Don't let's grow solemn.

PRINCESS. In my opinion, marriage was something altogether too excessive for such very light desires.

ENID. Desires. . . . (*Smiling wanly.*) Both he and I are dead to any wish.

PRINCESS. Don't say so.

ENID. Ah, but I do.

PRINCESS. What made you accept him, then ? Tell me.

ENID. It was purely a match of reason. At home I was generally in the way. Mamma and I were nothing but rivals. But let's not talk about it.

PRINCESS (*retrospective*). As a raw girl, I'd a disrelish for marriage too. But my parents sensibly made me. And when my first husband died, why, I soon remarried . . . and when he, poor fellow, succumbed—he was a world-renowned explorer—I was induced to listen again. . . . (*Slight pause.*) And I've been married in all *six times* !

ENID (*admiringly*). What a wonderful accumulation of experience you must have, Zena ?

PRINCESS. Yes. (*Grimly.*) When I want to impress a stranger, I carry their miniatures on my wrists—three on each arm.

ENID. Your last marriage, was it happy?

PRINCESS. My last marriage, my dear, was one long game of hide-and-seek.

ENID. I feel discouraged!

PRINCESS. A husband, one must remember, is something of an *acquired* taste.

ENID. Are they all alike?

PRINCESS. Why, of course not!

ENID. Aren't they?

PRINCESS (*Nibbling her fan*). No. Really, you provoke me to laugh!

ENID. I've been married a week and it isn't at all what I thought it would be!

PRINCESS (*tenderly*). Poor darling. How I would love to spoil you.

ENID. You dear. But you do. . . .

PRINCESS. Not enough.

ENID. Oh, Zena!

PRINCESS (*caressing admiringly her hair*). Not nearly enough, *Elf-locks.*

ENID (*coyly*). I'm all foolish nerves to-night!

PRINCESS. Poor Angel, Baby, Waif. . . .

ENID (*closing her eyes*). What would you advise?

PRINCESS. Make the most of youth! Remember nothing lasts. . . .

ENID. You think I should take a lover?

PRINCESS. No, no . . . you'd regret it.

ENID. There's no telling.

PRINCESS. Eventually, of course, you'll build a bridge!

ENID. Impossible.

PRINCESS. Tfoo!

ENID. He's so altered.

PRINCESS. How?

ENID. His tastes!

PRINCESS. They jar?

ENID. Dreadfully. His Hellenism once captivated me. But (*opening her eyes gloomily as wide as she is able*) the *Attic* to him means nothing now *but Servants' bedrooms.*

PRINCESS. Servants' what!

ENID (*faintly*). *Closets.*

PRINCESS (*behind her fan*). Oh!

ENID. It's revolting.

PRINCESS (*Philosophically*). In life, to be happy, the first rule is to learn pretty extensively to ignore.

ENID. I suppose, dearest, you were never situated before as I am?

PRINCESS (*nodding*). Yes, indeed! One of my husbands also left me!

ENID. Oh, Zena?

PRINCESS. Left me even sooner than yours!

ENID. It isn't credible!

PRINCESS. He said a thousand tender pretty things, called me a thousand charming names. And then, at the end of twenty-four hours, he deserted me!

ENID. What did you do?

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PRINCESS. What could I do?

ENID. If Eric deserts me, I daresay I could start an "Art School" here. It would be rather fun.

PRINCESS. Darling Enid, anything rather than that!

ENID (*puzzled*). But why?

PRINCESS. Because . . .

SCENE 8

Same. NADINE

NADINE (*flourishing wedding-ring*). Here it is!

ENID. Oh, thank you, Nadine.

NADINE. Put it on.

ENID (*evasively*). It's far too hot to wear a ring!

PRINCESS. Rubbish.

NADINE (*suppliant*). For me, dearest. Say you will!

ENID. Very well then, I will!

PRINCESS (*overbrimming with quiet fun*). How she dreads a scandal. . . .

NADINE (*her sensitive panic patently subsiding*). Well, it's not quite pleasant, is it? And foreign servants are such fools! They'd think it was a *faux-ménage*, or something.

ENID. As if I care!

PRINCESS (*urbane*). Were I she, I'd allow myself, perhaps, a little sneer. . . .

ENID. I don't mean to upset my expression on Eric's account.

PRINCESS. But only a little *tiny* one.

ENID (*toying listlessly with her ring*). Oh, don't ask me, please, to wear another thing more—! Even a sneer.

PRINCESS. For his good, one could wish he'd some interest. . . . A man should have aspirations, I always contend.

ENID. Ah, there, my dear, I'm with you. When I think that one of Caligula's horses was a Member of Parliament, and when I remember what a plain, simple cow rose to be, I own I'm mortified at Eric's unambition.

PRINCESS (*gasping*). What did the plain, simple cow rise to be?

ENID. She rose to be an Empress.

NADINE. An Empress?

ENID. Or a Goddess, was it! I'm sure I forget. (*A piano-organ is heard suddenly beyond the garden gate.*)

NADINE. Horrid to be outdone by animals.

ENID (*to dance-air, taking a few tripping steps*). Well, my dears! It's been a week of wonders!

PRINCESS. What is that?

NADINE (*raising her voice a little because of the organ*). She says it's been a week of wonders.

PRINCESS. Poor child! A week ago she was an insouciant girl!

NADINE. Insouciant!

PRINCESS (*watching the bride with a mistrustful eye*). I only hope she won't take to narcotics!

NADINE. We must not let her brood.

(*The organ stops.*)

PRINCESS. One day soon, Enid, let us ride together.

ENID. There's nothing I'd like more, only I've nothing to ride, I'm afraid.

PRINCESS. I will find you a charming little horse.

ENID (*dropping to her knees upon the grass*). What a darling you are!

PRINCESS (*Plying her fan*). Galloping down some green cattle-track in the cool of evening, child, you will soon forget your worries.

ENID (*nestling*). Your habit smells of Arcady. . . .

PRINCESS. Of what?

ENID. Arcady.

PRINCESS. Beyond the Porta San Gallo I often dismount and walk.

ENID. Enchanting.

PRINCESS. There's a road bordered by wild acacias I yearn to show you.

ENID (*elated*). Yes?

PRINCESS. And at its end there's a Calvary . . . and a church designed by Andrea Orcagna with the loveliest windows.

ENID. One might perhaps do a sketch or something?

PRINCESS. The green brightness of the glass is amazingly nice. And such touching mosaics there are. You'll see!

(*Enter through arch* L. LADY ROCKTOWER, *an uncommonly long and lean woman—once a well-known Beauty.*)

Scene 9

Same. Lady Rocktower

Lady Rocktower (*hand extended, advancing to* Nadine). I wrote to you about a week ago asking you to dinner, and having received no answer I thought I would ascertain . . .

Nadine (*retaining* Lady Rocktower's *hand captive in her own an instant in token of contrition*). Did I *never* answer?

Lady Rocktower. Both Lord Rocktower and I will be so disappointed if you fail us to-morrow night!

Nadine. To-morrow night I fear we shall be without either Adrian or Eric.

Lady Rocktower. Are they leaving Florence?

Nadine. Yes. . . .

Lady Rocktower. Dear me! I didn't know.

Nadine. They're leaving us—and Italy.

Lady Rocktower. I trust nothing serious!

Nadine. Nothing very.

Lady Rocktower. That's right. (*To* Enid.) *My dear,* what a foreign behind! I didn't recognise you at first!

Enid (*amused*). How do you like my Cinquecento jacket?

Lady Rocktower. Your fastidious, imaginative dresses would not suit everyone.

Enid. Fortunately.

LADY ROCKTOWER (*looking about her*). Where's Glyda?

NADINE. I don't know!

LADY ROCKTOWER. She came a few yards with me, and suddenly exclaimed: "Oh, bother," and then rushed back.

PRINCESS. Your daughter, I expect, will be here directly.

LADY ROCKTOWER (*shaking hands with* PRINCESS *very cordially*). Dear Princess! Although you live within a stone's throw, one sees simply *nothing* of you!

PRINCESS. Yes. *How is it*, I wonder?

LADY ROCKTOWER. I don't remember ever having seen you at my *Musicale*?

PRINCESS. Unfortunately. . . . But I hear it was quite wonderful. With Julie Bonbon and Emma Block . . .

LADY ROCKTOWER. Who told you?

PRINCESS. Mr Waterbird.

LADY ROCKTOWER. I must protest! He wasn't there.

PRINCESS. Oh! . . .

LADY ROCKTOWER. I can't be civil to a political traitor!

NADINE. My dear, in Politics there is no honour. Disraeli has said so.

LADY ROCKTOWER. Anyway I should never invite the Waterbirds. (*Cryptically.*) I regard Mrs Waterbird as *no acquisition*! ! !

PRINCESS (*irrelevantly*). I watched her in the

mirror once acting a little pantomime behind my back.

NADINE (*adjusting a pin*). They say she has three lovers. . . .

PRINCESS. Three?

ENID. Surely three lovers would be very inspiriting!

LADY ROCKTOWER. How is it, I'd like to know, you're parting so soon with yours? Were I a new-made wife, I'd hold my husband tight, grip his coat-tails and not let go!

ENID. His going is of little consequence really.

LADY ROCKTOWER. It's soon to play Penelope yet!

PRINCESS (*a shadow of recollection crossing her face*). Were I driven to choose, I'd prefer neglect, I think, to surfeit.

LADY ROCKTOWER. That, I suppose, depends upon the man.

PRINCESS (*with a half-laugh*). A husband's attentions *soon* grow savourless!

ENID (*her eyes raised towards the Gallery*). He married me in creaking shoes.

LADY ROCKTOWER. What?

ENID (*reminiscent, unearthly*). His shoes creaked when he married me!

LADY ROCKTOWER. I conclude you've been catching *glimpses* of each other. . . .

ENID. Glimpses?

LADY ROCKTOWER (*shrewdly*). I believe this is

nothing but a touch of sex-antagonism which presently will pass.

ENID (*evidently pleased with the consequence of the situation*). This morning my maid found three little grey ones—hairs.

NADINE. (*sympathetically*) Darling Enid! She talks like an old woman and she's a mere *fillette* still!

LADY ROCKTOWER. Were I you, my dear, I would go for him tooth-and-nail!

PRINCESS (*conciliatory*). I always pour oil on troubled waters. Harmony for me.

ENID (*with importance*). Three little grey ones.... (*She goes up stage enumerating them upon her fingers, and disappears after a moment in the garden.*)

NADINE (*following her with a look*). Now she has gone off into some jewelled-Hades of her own.

LADY ROCKTOWER. I'm bewildered to know what to advise!

NADINE (*musingly*). It's difficult to interfere—Enid and Eric vying in vanity with each other as they do.

LADY ROCKTOWER. They're not sufficiently different, one feels, to be happy together.

PRINCESS. Enid's clever of course but she needs directing.

LADY ROCKTOWER (*irreflective*). One comfort is there's no issue!

PRINCESS. My dear, give them time!

NADINE. It's quite dreadful to hear her refer to her wedding-day as *Black Tuesday*.

LADY ROCKTOWER. Thank Heaven! Marriage isn't indissoluble.

PRINCESS. They're unreckonably temperamental. Both of them. . . .

LADY ROCKTOWER. People of their sort oughtn't to marry.

NADINE. Last night she had a bad *crise des nerfs* and began calling sixteen "the Old Age of Youth."

PRINCESS (*fluttering her fan*). Is she *only* sixteen?

NADINE (*ignoring the interruption*). So this morning I sent into town for Dr Mater.

LADY ROCKTOWER. I don't think much of Dr Mater. He'll tell you of all sorts of things to avoid things that *in any case* it would never occur to one to take!

PRINCESS. What did he say?

NADINE. He has ordered her milk and the wings of chickens.

(*Enter* GLYDA ROCKTOWER, *aged eleven. She is pale, plump, precocious—an attaching manner.*)

SCENE 10

Same. GLYDA

PRINCESS. Ah! . . . *ecco-lâ*!

LADY ROCKTOWER. Wicked peach.

GLYDA (*standing legs apart and swinging in-*

solently her skirts). I met some people in the lane.

LADY ROCKTOWER. Who?

GLYDA. Guess?

LADY ROCKTOWER. I can't.

GLYDA (*pirouetting, preening herself*). Apollo—and Lord Orkish.

LADY ROCKTOWER. Apollo—who?

GLYDA. Reggie Quintus.

LADY ROCKTOWER. Oh!

GLYDA. I told them you were here. They're coming in.

(*Enter* LORD ORKISH. *He is, despite "Exile" and a "certain age," all cheerfulness, gaiety and sweet good-humour. Behind him* REGGIE QUINTUS. *Incredibly young. Incredibly good-looking. No one would suppose him to have figured as hero already in at least one* cause-célèbre—*his manner, which is somewhat "subdued," alternates between the demi-dazed and the demi-demure.*)

SCENE II

Same. LORD ORKISH, REGGIE QUINTUS

LORD ORKISH. Do we intrude?

NADINE. Delighted.

LORD ORKISH. We've just been paying a *visite de digestion* on Comtesse Willie White, and are on our way to Salut at San Lorenzo.

NADINE. Then there's no immediacy, is there?

LORD ORKISH (*shaking hands*). Why, none.

LADY ROCKTOWER. Perhaps you can inform me if Madame Gandarella is still at the Villa?

LORD ORKISH. Yes; and Santuzza.

NADINE (*laughing*). That poor Santuzza. She has the most fearful English accent in the world. Where is it! What is it! Who could have taught her? I wonder.

LORD ORKISH. People are circulating such dreadful stories!

PRINCESS (*miraculously*). What about?

LORD ORKISH. I'm so newsy. (*Irrepressibly.*) I feel I must tell it to somebody, if only a lizard, or a butterfly, or a garden-snail!

NADINE. Sit down and tell us instead.

(*All but imperceptibly, twilight begins to form.*)

LORD ORKISH. I've but just this afternoon heard the Alpmuriels are leaving one another! . . . Mrs Alpmuriel, in fact, has already gone.

LADY ROCKTOWER. NADINE. Gone? (*Ensemble.*) Where?

LORD ORKISH. Away.

LADY ROCKTOWER. Dear me!

LORD ORKISH (*impressionistically*). Instead of surprising them—*comment dirai-je?*—he found them, unmysteriously eating.

LADY ROCKTOWER. *Eating?*

LORD ORKISH. Only imagine!!! And he with his drawn sword—or a revolver, was it?

LADY ROCKTOWER. Oh!

LORD ORKISH (*playing extinct eyes*). Sir Dolfin Lewis is defending her.

PRINCESS (*amused*). And what else, Lord Orkish, did you hear at the Villa White ?

LORD ORKISH. That the new American Ambassadress likes to be thought a little *grisette*.

LADY ROCKTOWER. I sat next her a short while ago at the Theatro Valli.

NADINE. You did not tell me you had been to Rome !

REGGIE (*in a voice which is rather like cheap scent*). Perhaps you won't agree. But I consider Florence has fewer amenities than Rome.

NADINE. It depends what one means by amenities, quite.

REGGIE (*regarding thoughtfully his white compact hands*). I always feel a sort of *malaise in* Florence. Why, I can't tell.

LADY ROCKTOWER (*Austerely*). I fear the morals of the town are not especially high !

LORD ORKISH. A neighbour of ours sent her little maid the other night across the Piazza for a bottle of French brandy, and she has not been heard of again.

NADINE. How dreadful.

ENID (*coming down with a watering-can of Pesaro pottery in her hand. She is smiling and has tucked into her dress a huge blue Passion-flower*). I heard men's voices. . . .

NADINE. Lord Orkish has been regaling us with a whole rosary of piquant anecdotes.

ENID. Really.

NADINE (*to* LORD ORKISH). You've such wonderful *entraînement.*

LORD ORKISH (*very simply*). I'm never bored. I enjoy everything.

REGGIE. So do I too! I love society. Alone with my shadow I'm soon depressed.

NADINE (*rather nervously*). And where have you been to, Reggie, this perfect age?

REGGIE (*bending his head a little on one side to inhale the scent of the tuberose flowers that are in his button-hole*). I and a friend of mine, Claud Cloudley, we've been visiting all the P.'s.

NADINE. All the what?

REGGIE. Pavia, Parma, Padua, Perugia, Pisa——

PRINCESS. Is it a method?

REGGIE. Claud's such an extremist, you know. (*Lowering impressively his voice.*) They say when he kissed the Pope's slipper (*a gentle cough*) he went on to do considerably *more.* . . .

GLYDA (*intrigued*). What's he like, Reggie?

REGGIE (*nonchalantly*). He's rather good-looking in a sickly sort of way.

GLYDA (*disappointed*). What a description!

ENID (*slyly*). I expect he's very good-looking!

REGGIE (*smiling*). He's sickly.

PRINCESS. I remember him coming to see me once in England, with his dripping umbrella.

LORD ORKISH. Shall you be going to England, Princess, later on?

PRINCESS (*cooling her cheeks with a powder-puff*). Perhaps, if I can afford it.

NADINE. To hear her speak, she might be a Poor Clare!

LADY ROCKTOWER (*Vivaciously*). Our villa is let for the coming villeggiatura to Madame Olga Wittena-Gemot, the famous singer, and my husband is rampant with me because Renaldo Renetti——

(*Re-enter* ERIC, *with billiard cue.*)

SCENE 12

Same. ERIC

ERIC (*to* ENID). Shake me a cocktail, darling. Do.

ENID. Oh, don't ask me to do anything so violent, Eric. Where's Angelo?

NADINE (*who looks as though she would be also glad of some refreshment herself*). What shall it be? West-Coast? Manhattan? Kiss-me-Quick?

ERIC. Let it be a Gloom-Raiser.

NADINE. There's no more absinthe, I fear.

ERIC. Then a Champagne-Cobbler.

NADINE (*generally*). Will you excuse me?

[*Exit* NADINE *to house.*

LADY ROCKTOWER. Now, I'm going to scold him!

ENID. No; Lady Rocktower.

LADY ROCKTOWER. And Princess Zoubaroff shall second me.

PRINCESS. Oh, please! I'm unrepresented. (*She drifts away.*)

ERIC. *Buona sera.*

(*He begins balancing his billiard-cue in the palm of his hand.* ENID, *with an ironic glance, follows* PRINCESS *towards hammock, where* LORD ORKISH *and* REGGIE *have commenced rocking* GLYDA.)

ENID (*witheringly, withdrawing*). He is the Eternal-masculine.

LADY ROCKTOWER (*toute entière à sa proie attachée*). Heartless man; and so you're going to leave us?

ERIC (*inconsequently*). For a time.

LADY ROCKTOWER. You propose, of course, returning?

ERIC (*with an air of detachment*). I expect so!

LADY ROCKTOWER. I think Enid is a saint about it all. (*Warming.*) For a honeymoon's a honeymoon, however one looks at it.

ERIC. Bored people do desperate things.

LADY ROCKTOWER (*fairly floored*). Why on earth did you marry?

ERIC (*ceasing juggling*). I was only half-serious when I proposed.

LADY ROCKTOWER. And she accepted you?

ERIC. I never expected to be taken quite *au pied de lettre.*

LADY ROCKTOWER. Fool.

ERIC. I beg your pardon?

LADY ROCKTOWER. I said insensate! (*He continues his experiments with the cue.*) (*Beside herself.*) Come down to us a little more. Forsake those heights!

ERIC (*turning away*). If I leave you for a moment will you forgive me.

ENID (*reapproaching*). Lady Rocktower! Please——

LADY ROCKTOWER. He seems determined!

ENID. Let him go.

LADY ROCKTOWER (*susceptibly*). He has nice eyes.

ENID. There's something agreeably piquant—*almost*—about his excessive leanness!

LADY ROCKTOWER. Perhaps so.

ENID. And I don't so *much* detest his big, bold nose!

LADY ROCKTOWER. Tell me, dear. Were you solicited besides?

ENID. Was I——

LADY ROCKTOWER. Did anyone else ask you?

ENID (*exaggerating*). I should say so indeed. I might have married whom I liked.

LADY ROCKTOWER. You seem to have selected an enigma!

ENID (*playing with her Passion-flower*). I will say this for Eric, he isn't carnal.

LADY ROCKTOWER. He isn't carnal enough, my dear, from what *I* can see. (*Half to herself.*) He must have the blood of an Esquimaux!

ENID. I scarcely realised, I suppose, at the time of my marriage, I was taking him on for a *term of years*.

LADY ROCKTOWER (*prophetic*). O! But it won't be years! A term of weeks, dear, more like at the rate things go.

ENID. I think my nerves need Mozart.

(*Enter* ANGELO, *a boy of sixteen, fair, sleek, languishing, a "Benozzo Gozzoli," bearing a tray with lemonade, sorbets, fruit, etc. He wears a trim black livery with violet-coloured facings and shoulder-knots.*)

SCENE 13

Same. ANGELO

LADY ROCKTOWER (*helping herself recklessly to strawberries*). I will order a Novena said for you.

(*Attracted by* ANGELO *and the tinkle of ice,* GLYDA *and* REGGIE *come down, followed more leisurely by* LORD ORKISH *and* PRINCESS. *Later* NADINE. *The twilight deepens. Lights, here and there, shine from town.*)

REGGIE. I believe strawberries are the clue to my heart!

ENID. Are they?

REGGIE. I'm most awfully *friande* of fruit.

GLYDA (*Circling butterfly about*). I'm fond of grapes, and apricots if they're green. . . . I can't say I like *bananas.*

LADY ROCKTOWER. Fastidious child.

REGGIE. I adore them.

GLYDA. How much?

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REGGIE (*wittily*). As a Russian does Nice.

ENID. Angelo! (*Backing him down towards footlights.*)

ANGELO. Signora!

ENID (*sotto voce*). Have you the key of your master's valise?

ANGELO (*passionately*). *Ah, Madonna!*

ENID. Answer me.

ANGELO (*as before*). *Ah, Mamma mia!*

ENID (*taking a sorbet*). You haven't?

ANGELO. *Ah, caro dio!*

ENID. It doesn't matter.

ANGELO. *Ah, che roba!* (*He crosses stage, rolling his black eyes, passing* ADRIAN L.)

SCENE 14

Same. ADRIAN

ADRIAN (*to* ENID). Have you seen Eric?

ENID (*sipping her sorbet*). He was here a moment ago.

ADRIAN. Visitors! (*He seems disconcerted at sight of* REGGIE.)

PRINCESS (*continuing her conversation with* LORD ORKISH). I sent my new photo quarter-face to the Cardinal, and he said——

ENID (*drinking still*). You'll think of the Eidelweiss, won't you—if it's only a single sprig!

ADRIAN. Eh?

ENID. It would so touch Nadine . . . Poor

angel. She's always wanting some rare, far thing.

ADRIAN. I know.

ENID (*lightly*). So be, be a dear!

REGGIE (*deftly, to* LADY ROCKTOWER, *without interrupting at all* ADRIAN *and* ENID). They had hoped it was Tiepolo—but it's only Sebastian Ricci.

ADRIAN. But it isn't the season for Eidelweiss.

ENID. Nonsense!

ADRIAN. I promise you.

ENID. You needn't try to put me off with an excuse!

LORD ORKISH (*very deftly, to* PRINCESS). Lady Audrey's still at Cannes. I hear you wouldn't know her! She's grown so stout.

ENID (*asserting her voice pathetically in general appeal*). Isn't it the season for Eidelweiss?

LADY ROCKTOWER. For Eidelweiss? I'm sure I don't know.

ENID (*setting down her glass*). It is the season. It *is*.

GLYDA (*to* PRINCESS). What is the music written on your fan?

PRINCESS. A gipsy song—a *chansonette*.

ENID (*obstinately*). I will wager you what you like, Eidelweiss grows *all the year round*.

NADINE (*re-entering from house*). I think I hear the front door bell!

ADRIAN. It's amazing you hear anything.

(*Enter* ANGELO, *followed by* BLANCHE.)

ANGELO (*announcing*). Mrs Negress. (*He goes out, looking over his shoulder, apparently at* REGGIE.)

SCENE 15

Same. BLANCHE NEGRESS. *Her hair, worn short, in wildest spirals, is tinged with white. She is dressed in grey, like a Beguine. She has a pannier of red lilies.*

BLANCHE. I walked along a pink footpath, through the olive-gardens till I saw a dog, which *nearly* drove me back. I don't know why it should be, but Italian dogs fly at me as a rule!

ENID (*accepting pannier, which* BLANCHE *tends*). It's nice, your coming.

NADINE. Do you know everybody? Lady Rocktower, Mrs Negress—Lord Orkish, Mr Quintus, Princess Zoubaroff—Zena, this is Blanche!

PRINCESS. Delighted.

LORD ORKISH. I expect it was *my* dog. I left one at the door. (*He moves up.*)

NADINE (*introducing*). My husband.

BLANCHE (*genially*). I think we've slept together once?

ADRIAN. I don't remember.

BLANCHE. At the Opera. During *Bérénice*!

ADRIAN. Why, of course.

NADINE (*glimpsing* ERIC). Mr Tresilian——

ERIC. I give you full permission to slay me.

ENID. Why should she wish to slay you?

NADINE. Hark to his guilty conscience!

PRINCESS (*to* BLANCHE). I confess, with shame, I never read one of your books.

BLANCHE (*amiable*). It took me four years to choose my *nom de guerre*—Mary.

PRINCESS (*with a cry*). Are you Mary?

BLANCHE. I am.

PRINCESS. Oh, then, *Love's Visé*—I know. . . . And *Lesbia, or Would He Understand?* (*Her admiration is boundless.*)

ENID (*indicating books*). By the way, Zena, I haven't thanked you properly——

PRINCESS. Were any of them interesting at all?

ENID. I should think so.

PRINCESS (*affectionately*). *Cara.*

ENID (*with a look at* ERIC). I'm glad I can still sometimes drug my senses with a book.

NADINE. I've been perusing *Lord Tiredstock's Memoirs.*

PRINCESS. His biography is the barest memoranda, but it's wonderful.

(REGGIE, *at table where are* PRINCESS'S *books, chuckles.*)

ENID. What is amusing you?

REGGIE (*convulsed*). *Orfeo.*

ENID. What about it.

REGGIE. It's too cruel.

ENID. No.

REGGIE (*reading*). "Woman is an object that always makes man ridiculous."

NADINE (*shrieking*). Fiend!

REGGIE (*continuing*). "If she is ugly—oh! What a misery! If she is beautiful—oh! What a danger! And whether one takes her or leaves her one always repents one's action."

LADY ROCKTOWER (*protesting*). Well, really!

ENID. Aren't you ashamed to read such things aloud to *us*?

REGGIE. You said I might.

PRINCESS. Mercifully, very soon it will be too dark to read!

GLYDA (*indicating*). Oh, do look at the sky!

NADINE. Extravagant, isn't it?

ERIC (*grumbling*). Another airless night!

LADY ROCKTOWER. I'm quite glad, do you know, of my Resorgimento cape. (*Puts wrap on.*)

PRINCESS. It is lightening a little towards the town.

BLANCHE. Florence fascinates me at sundown with its scores of shimmering lights.

LADY ROCKTOWER. The evenings grow dark here so very beautifully.

GLYDA. There's a sickle moon.

PRINCESS. Where? Show me.

GLYDA. Can't you see it? There, through the trees. (*She turns to* BLANCHE.)

BLANCHE (*Modestly*). I fear I'm becoming too obese to look at the moon.

ADRIAN (*inviting*). Then look, do, at the shadows instead.

BLANCHE (*staring*). The shadows?

NADINE. Adrian sees shapes in everything.

(*Laughing.*) He calls the trees at the foot of the garden an " obscene brigade."

LADY ROCKTOWER. My dear, if they choose to grow that way . . .

PRINCESS (*indolently*). Not a frond stirs. It's as if a spell held all fast.

ENID (*sniffing*). Delicious. The fresh odour of the dew.

PRINCESS. My favourite tree is certainly the Cypress.

GLYDA (*Taking her fan from her and using it*). Why ?

PRINCESS. It tells no tales !

NADINE. But monotonous, like all evergreens are.

BLANCHE (*blinking at a flash of summer lightning*). There was a beautiful thunderstorm the evening I arrived.

ENID. At the " Bretagne," Blanche, you would see !

BLANCHE. Yes ; my room is on the river.

LORD ORKISH (*returning*). I don't know at all what the Arno is coming to. I was leaning on my window-sill (*laughs*) and there were some youths who appeared to be bathing without false modesty of *any* kind.

LADY ROCKTOWER (*covering her eyes with an elaborately becoroneted Vanity-bag*). How dreadful.

LORD ORKISH (*pursuing*). I'm sure if I looked it was quite involuntary.

LADY ROCKTOWER (*Sympathetically*). I'm sure

you couldn't help yourself from standing and looking.

NADINE (*sentimentally*). I love the Arno at low water.

ADRIAN. It's always that. Beyond the town it's unnavigable for even a newspaper!

ERIC (*to* BLANCHE). Enid was saying you write for one.

BLANCHE (*proudly*). I write for several.

ERIC. Oh? Which?

BLANCHE. Mainly women's. . . . (*A little sadly.*) I was instrumental *in a very large degree* in obtaining my sex the vote.

PRINCESS. You are one of our champions then?

BLANCHE. Yes.

LADY ROCKTOWER. I'm glad you believe in us!

BLANCHE. Men amuse me sometimes. (*Simply.*) But I have never really loved one.

ERIC (*astonished*). You have never loved *any* man?

BLANCHE. Never!

LADY ROCKTOWER (*nervously fastening a hook to her cape*). It's a pleasure to meet now and again a woman of really advanced morals.

BLANCHE. I can safely say I prefer the society of other women to that of men.

PRINCESS. That's nice of you.

LADY ROCKTOWER (*to* NADINE). Well, dear, I really must run. I wish I hadn't had to!

NADINE. Must you?

ENID. Stay a little while. It's absurdly early yet.

LADY ROCKTOWER. There's to be a small *sauterie* this evening at the Harkovs'.

NADINE. We were asked, but I didn't feel like going.

ENID. I'm far too slack to go fagging up to Fiesole to-night.

LADY ROCKTOWER (*to* GLYDA). Come, child!

NADINE. Good-bye. You'll come and see me sometimes, won't you?

LADY ROCKTOWER (*moving towards garden gate with* GLYDA). Often, if you wish it.

ENID. Do!

LADY ROCKTOWER (*up stage, at a distance*). To-morrow . . . let me see. Is there no charming church where we could go and sit?

SCENE 16

Same. Minus LADY ROCKTOWER *and* GLYDA

LORD ORKISH (*low, to* REGGIE). And we ought to be toddling too.

REGGIE (*deaf, to* ERIC). We might frivole round together one evening if you like.

ERIC (*primly*). I should love to, only I've no leisure for anything just now.

PRINCESS (*observant, to* LORD ORKISH). In Spain, I'm told, you must first court the husband to get round the wife.

LORD ORKISH (*appalled at so much cynicism*). Madame! Madame?

BLANCHE (*to* ADRIAN, *designating something*). What is that big brick pile?

ADRIAN (*looking*). Where? You surely don't mean the Signoria?

BLANCHE. Such a sad, fateful sunset.

LORD ORKISH (*touching* REGGIE'S *arm*). Ready?

REGGIE (*backing-out of Salut*). I'm so sorry . . . but I clean forgot! I've a *rendez-vous*.

LORD ORKISH. Where?

REGGIE. At the quag end of the Cascine.

LORD ORKISH. Which end's that?

REGGIE. The quag end? The far end. . . .

LORD ORKISH. We can go part of the way together.

NADINE (*coming down*). Dear Lady Rocktower. She gets statelier every year. (*Seeing* LORD ORKISH *and* REGGIE *are preparing to depart.*) What? You're off?

LORD ORKISH. It's getting late.

NADINE. Try and look in to-morrow.

REGGIE (*to* PRINCESS). Bye-bye. I press your hand. (*Does so.*)

LORD ORKISH. I fear I'm engaged to-morrow.

NADINE. Tiresome creature!

LORD ORKISH (*as he goes up, accompanied by* REGGIE). I'm attending a tertullia *chez Camille*!

NADINE (*graciously*). Well, *Addio* for the present.

[*Exeunt, by garden gate,* LORD ORKISH *and* REGGIE.

BLANCHE (*precipitately making after them*). As they know the way, I think I'll go with them.

[*Exit* BLANCHE.

Scene 17

Same. Minus Lord Orkish, Reggie, Blanche.

Princess. It must be almost dinner-time!

Adrian. I expect you're hungry after riding so far.

Princess. I am!

Eric. That's right.

Princess. This morning my French cook got locked, by mistake, in the orchid-house, and I've had nothing to eat all day.

Nadine *and* Enid (*coming down*). Stay and dine with us.

Princess. Impossible.

Enid. Because?

Princess. I must change.

Nadine. Look in after, then.

Enid. Yes, do, Zena.

Princess (*considering*). Perhaps I may peep in quite at the very end of the evening.

Nadine. We'll expect you.

Princess (*going*). I'll bring a little volume of Higher Mysticism with me—shall I?—that I think you'll *adore*.

Enid (*blowing her a kiss*). How delightful.

Princess. Till by-and-by.

[*Exit* Princess.

Scene 18

Adrian, Eric, Nadine, Enid

Adrian (*to* Eric). Shall we finish our game?

Eric. By all means.

Enid (*affronted*). Are you going indoors?

Eric (*with simpering ardour*). *Auf Wiedersehen*, my deathless girl.

[*Exeunt* Adrian *and* Eric.

Scene 19

Nadine, Enid

Enid (*complaining*). Why aren't the Nightingales singing, and why is there no moon?

Nadine. But there is, dearest. A delicate new one—all for us.

Enid. I mean a proper moon.

Nadine. My dear Enid (*focusing the moon with a black-rimmed eyeglass*), I see nothing improper about this one.

Enid. I meant a full moon, darling.

Nadine. I don't know why you should prefer it to be full. A full moon is perhaps rather vulgar!

Enid. Vulgar?

Nadine. Just a little.

(Angelo *enters and takes away empty glasses,*

murmuring intermittently to himself below his breath.)

ANGELO. *Ah poveretta! La povera signora. Ah che roba! Ah, Dio!* (*He is almost crying in his distress for* ENID.)

ENID. I suppose they leave early?

NADINE. I've no idea.

ENID. I shan't come down.

NADINE. Neither will I. I intend receiving his parting peck in bed.

ENID. Eric never gives me such tangible proofs of his affection.

NADINE. Doesn't he?

ENID. In the morning he just touches my hand —and then he just grazes it—*et encore*! !—again at night.

NADINE (*after an instant, pacing to and fro*). You know, Enid, I consulted Dr Mater this morning, after he'd seen you.

ENID. What about?

NADINE (*after another instant*). My health is in a very delicate state, dear.

ENID (*alarmed*). Darling Nadine!

NADINE. Yes, I may be obliged—but I won't tax your little ears with it just now.

ENID (*anxious to ascertain the facts*). Is it anything dreadful?

NADINE. It depends what one means quite by dreadful. (*Half-hysterically.*) Define dreadful!

ENID (*taking* NADINE'S *hand*). I'm so sorry . . .

NADINE (*turning from her*). Of course we may all be wrong. . . .

ENID (*with fervour*). I do sincerely hope so!

NADINE. I must go and dress. . . .

ENID (*calling after her*). Tell Fergusson, dear, as you're going in, my gown with the Camellias.

SCENE 20

ENID, *Sola. She stands a moment, lost in conjecture. All the bells of Florence ring out. From the Judas-tree a nightingale utters a trill. Another replies. . . . All in an instant the air is full of the singing of birds, the tintinnabulation of bells. The sky is abloom with stars.*

ENID (*to herself, aloud*). What can she be going to have?

(*Moving towards a flower-plat she inhales, indolently, a flower. A gong goes within. Right hand to hip, left raised to chevelure, she goes slowly up.*)

ENID (*lifting roguishly towards the sky her face*). It sounds almost as though she were sickening for the Plague. . . .

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT II

Scene I

Same as Act I., only the trees have changed their tints. Some are orange, some are scarlet. Red creepers. Autumn flowers.

Nadine, *slightly overdressed in black, with a colossal hat of Piedmontese cock's-feathers, is seen with a couple of lace pocket-handkerchiefs tied to two fingers (which she bobs and waggles), diverting her infant son.* Enid, *from hammock (her gown is white, with clusters of sophisticated-looking fruit hanging from it), is listlessly watching her.*

Enid (*breaking at last the "September Silence"*). Why did you have it?

Nadine (*with a sigh, half-of pride, half-of resignation*). My dear, I simply couldn't help myself. . . .

Enid. I thought you cleverer!

Nadine (*to the infant*). Charles Augustus Frederic Humphrey Percy Sydney!

Enid. At any rate, I'm glad the christening's over.

Nadine (*soulfully*). Yes. But it was beautiful.

Enid (*despondently*). And now this wretched party.

Nadine (*kissing little* Charles). He is just like an opening orchid.

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ENID (*sitting up—she has in her hand a crystal*). Just like what?

NADINE (*rocking*). Forgive a mother's selfishness.

ENID. I won't let him monopolise you, Nadine.

NADINE (*oblivious*). His mania for pulling everything to pieces makes me anxious for his happiness later on.

ENID (*looking round*). Here is Mrs Mangrove.

(*Enter* NURSE. *She is Scotch. Portly. A woman of fifty. One realises immediately she would have her theories, her "little ways," as regards Nursery matters.*)

SCENE 2

Same. NURSE

NADINE. You shall take him, Nurse.

NURSE. Very good, marm. (*Taking child.*)

NADINE. Gently, mind.

NURSE (*bursting into song*).

The man in the moone drinks claret,
Eates powdered beef, turnip and caret,
But a cup of old Malaga sack
Will fire the bushe at his backe.

ENID (*detached*). I hope you enjoyed the christening, Nurse?

NURSE. To be sure. I seldom saw a bonnier.

NADINE (*privately, to* NURSE). See that he——

NURSE. He doesn't want to again, marm, Lord bless you! (*She bustles off through the trees with the child nevertheless.*)

SCENE 3

NADINE, ENID

NADINE (*distressed*). I am afraid she cannot have seen very distinguished service.

ENID. In the last family she was in, on Notting Hill, she told me the governess and the five children used to go out roller-skating through the London streets. . . .

NADINE (*crossing over to her*). Have you made any further discovery, Enid, in the crystal at all?

ENID. It's difficult. . . . I ought to have something to hold.

NADINE (*drawing something from her dress*). Here is the last letter he wrote to me.

ENID (*taking it*). Thanks.

NADINE. I feel it may be the last he *ever* wrote. . . .

ENID (*airily*). Something tells me they are the two that slipped.

NADINE (*closing her eyes, gesticulating*). It's appalling to think of them both falling . . . sinking.

ENID. Tsch!

NADINE. You may read what Adrian says.

ENID (*humouring her*). "The walks—the walks

are a continual delight. On all sides—turn where one will—beauty breaks on beauty. . . ."

NADINE (*euphoniously, with her lips*). Beauty breaks on beauty. . . .

ENID (*resuming*). "Wonder leaps on wonder." (*her voice breaking a little*). "I think of you sometimes at Livorno, where the green waves roll in ceaselessly and the brown fishing-nets upon the beach lie drying in the sun."

NADINE. Because I told him we might be going to Livorno.

ENID (*commenting*). A more depraved-looking autograph I've seldom seen!

NADINE (*with authority*). Now use the ball.

ENID (*after an instant*). In the crystal I see a beautiful little giraffe.

NADINE. A giraffe?

ENID. Such a darling. Oh, and I can see a hut, a little house . . . (*She begins to squeal.*)

NADINE. That must be the guide's dwelling.

ENID (*still gazing*). I think it's an antelope, not a giraffe.

NADINE (*anxiously*). What is it doing?

ENID (*straining*). Nothing.

NADINE. There, that's enough for the present. I want you fresh for the party.

ENID (*returning letter*). It's a mistake, I think, having ordered tea indoors.

NADINE. It saves a lot of bother.

ENID (*thoughtfully*). Awkward if Monsignor Vanhove should call here to-day.

NADINE (*flurried, applying to her lips a cosmetic*). Did Zena say he'd call?

ENID. She said he might.

NADINE. I believe she intends taking it.

ENID. What? The veil?

NADINE. I'm sure.

ENID (*thrilled*). But *are* you?

NADINE. And what's more, my dear, she also intends us!

ENID (*giggling nervously*). Oh, I could never be a nun.

NADINE. Couldn't you?

ENID. Could I? . . .

(*Enter* PRINCESS)

NADINE. Ah, here is Charlie's new godmother.

SCENE 4

Same. PRINCESS. *She wears something which is crocus-coloured, contrasting radiantly with the autumnal foliage of the trees, a foppish hat, a winter-day muff. . . . She is looking charmingly Carthaginian.*

PRINCESS (*coming forward*). Charles Augustus Frederic—what are the others?

NADINE. Humphrey, Percy, Sydney.

PRINCESS (*frowning, shocked*). Such a wicked, dissolute name!

ENID. Names. . . .

NADINE. *Cher amour.*

PRINCESS. Well, Charlie's mother (*taking* NADINE's *hands*), you're happy? You're content?

NADINE (*soulful, ethereal as before*). It was beautiful.

ENID (*matter of fact*). Was Violet du Wilson present?

PRINCESS (*nodding*). With a sort of Starfish in her hair.

NADINE. Violet's changed. She has the look of a great sinner. . . .

PRINCESS. Poor little woman—I want her *so* much.

NADINE (*dropping her eyes*). You want her? What for?

PRINCESS. For my community.

ENID. Oh, Zena!

PRINCESS. I want you too.

NADINE. Us?

PRINCESS. I mean to have you.

ENID. No.

PRINCESS (*giving* ENID *a brush in the face with her muff*). Oh, yes I do.

ENID (*changing the subject*). Who else did you see at Santa Maria Novella?

PRINCESS (*vaguely*). The Harkovs, the Scharas, the Rocktowers. (*Laughing.*) Even old Mr Hope, who never goes anywhere. . . .

NADINE. I can't suffer Countess Harkov, I'm afraid. She thinks she has only to smile to stir up an ocean of passion.

PRINCESS. It's a pity now she's getting to look so bloated.

ENID (*meaningly*). You don't want her, I hope!

PRINCESS (*Christian*). I want everybody—at least——

ENID (*curiously*). But have you found your site?

PRINCESS (*mysteriously*). I'm in communication with the Vatican now.

NADINE. So you are actually in touch!

PRINCESS (*nodding*). My prospectus, I may say, is practically approved. . . .

ENID. By the Holy Father?

PRINCESS (*evasively*). Monsignor Vanhove would do anything for me.

NADINE. Where will you fix?

PRINCESS. Beyond Setignano, I think.

ENID. Zena!

PRINCESS. What?

ENID. It's too utterly Uganda.

PRINCESS. Uganda?

ENID. Far off.

PRINCESS. Nonsense . . . what does one want to be near to?

ENID (*racily*). I don't know what one wants to be near, but I know that Setignano is dreadfully ungetatable.

PRINCESS. One can't attain soul-stillness, dearest, within earshot of trains and trams.

NADINE (*catching her infant's howl*). No, nor within earshot of my son and heir!

[*Exit* NADINE *hurriedly to house.*

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Scene 5

Enid, Princess

Enid (*hands to ears*). *Should I, could I, might I, dare I,* drown it ?

Princess (*by hammock, frankly smiling*). I almost wish you could.

Enid (*shocked, surprised*). How ungodmotherly, Zena, of you !

Princess (*seating herself*). The worst of it is the Holy Father may not consent to have a boy brought up among us. . . .

Enid (*wondering, artless*). Among whom ?

Princess. A little girl would have been easier to receive. . . .

Enid. Where ?

Princess. In a Religious House.

Enid (*laughing*). A young man of Charlie's age can go anywhere.

Princess (*scrupulous*). It might give the nuns thoughts.

Enid (*still laughing*). Thoughts ?

Princess (*Toying with the tassels on her muff*). Sexual ones.

Enid. Oh . . . but an infant !

Princess. All the same dear infants—and a nun is such a sensitive creature as a rule.

Enid. I can't see that it matters at all. (*After a hesitation.*) It might do later !

Princess. Of course, some of us will be widows.

ENID. *You*, dear, for one.

PRINCESS (*with a sigh*). Looking back, how droll it seems.

ENID (*diffident, cautious*). Looking back at what?

PRINCESS. At everything.

ENID. This mystic side to you, Zena, is it something new?

PRINCESS. No.

ENID. Your late husband—did he know of it?

PRINCESS (*lifting her shoulders slightly*). He may have guessed.

ENID. Only "guessed."

PRINCESS. Racing, pigeon-shooting, billiards and whist were his chief pleasures. . . .

ENID. An egoist?

PRINCESS (*softly reminiscent*). Nils was different. He knew . . .

ENID. Who was Nils?

PRINCESS. He was my first.

ENID. Oh?

PRINCESS. I adored him. We *adored* each other. (*With a sigh.*) He was the dearest of *all* my husbands.

ENID. Tell me about him.

PRINCESS. He was not strong. He required always enormous precautions.

ENID. I presume you nursed him.

PRINCESS (*whimsically*). Such a strange, bored and beautiful face he had . . . though harrowingly

thin he was. (*Laughing.*) I sometimes miss his clever imitations of farmyard noises.

ENID (*fascinated*). Yes?

PRINCESS (*mirthlessly*). Hee-haw — Cock-a-doodle-doo.

ENID. He must leave a blank. . . .

PRINCESS. I remember he died just as the clock was striking midday. . . .

ENID (*speechless*). . . . !

PRINCESS (*poignant-eyed*). Such a charming, such a brilliant man. . . . He begged me to mourn him in Chinese fashion—White.

ENID. Which, of course, you did?

PRINCESS. And then, when all the wreaths were spread (*demonstrating*), I danced a *gavotte* over his grave.

ENID. He was not the explorer?

PRINCESS. Oh no.

ENID. What was *he* like?

PRINCESS (*evasively*). Poor Phil—I forget what it was I didn't like about him. . . .

ENID (*prompt*). His beard.

PRINCESS. Phil had no beard.

ENID. Which was the one that had?

PRINCESS. Hugh. He broke my heart.

ENID (*after an instant*). Oh, isn't God far off! Zena! Isn't He, dear?

PRINCESS (*unruffled, abbessish*). No, Enid. I don't think He is—not very.

ENID. Don't you?

PRINCESS (*smiling*). Certainly I don't.

ENID (*impulsive*). Do you care to understand me better? (*Leaning against* PRINCESS.) Well—I prefer *St John of the Cross* to *St Vincent de Paul*!

PRINCESS. So do I!

ENID (*a slight pause; count "six"*). I feel I don't want love exactly,—but some thrilling friendship. . . .

PRINCESS (*arch, gay, diagnosing*). You want God, dear.

ENID. God?

PRINCESS. That is what is lacking.

ENID (*as* NADINE *appears*). If it only were that!

SCENE 6

Same. NADINE

NADINE. I found Angelo in the loggia licking the ices.

ENID. Oh, Nadine.

PRINCESS. Do you go to Doney or Giacosa?

NADINE. Giacosa.

ENID (*moving towards house*). Oughtn't one to be going in?

NADINE (*following her*). I suppose one should!

PRINCESS (*dawdling*). Delightful, the early Dahlias.

NADINE (*to* PRINCESS). Coming?

[*Exeunt* ENID *and* NADINE *to house. Re-enter* NURSE *from the right, bearing little* CHARLES.

Scene 7

Princess, Nurse, Infant

Princess (*observing their names, admiring the dahlias*). Louis-Philippe, Mrs Marvel—voluptuous Mrs Marvel! (*Bending.*) Princepessa Valentine di Odescalchi—a new variety, is it?

Nurse. It's been a glorious day, your Highness, for your godson's christening!

Princess. You made me jump!

Nurse (*holding up infant*). He's a fine vigorous boy, marm!

Princess. Very.

Nurse. Oh, he's such a lusty little devil!

Princess. He's handsome enough!

Nurse (*tossing him*). Oh, he's a little sly one!

Princess (*Shaking her muff at him*). He never cried once as he was sprinkled!

Nurse. He never noticed. All the while he was being baptized he was making Turk's eyes at a couple of pig-tails.

Princess. Such a crowd at Santa Maria I've seldom seen.

Nurse. Poor Mrs Sheil-Meyer. People are so sorry for her.

Princess. It's terrible, I know.

Nurse (*voluble, familiar*). Begging your pardon, marm, but do you think the Master's really dead?

Princess (*surprised*). I'm much afraid so!

Nurse. I don't, then!

PRINCESS (*arrested*). Ah?

NURSE. I'm just suspicious. (*Wisely.*) The service I've seen . . .

PRINCESS (*vaguely*). Well, all the papers . . .

NURSE (*contemptuously*). The papers!

PRINCESS. And the inquiries that were made . . .

NURSE. I shouldn't wonder, now, if he's not in America.

PRINCESS. In America?

NURSE. He and his friend.

PRINCESS. What makes you think that?

NURSE (*beaming*). Gracious powers! (*Darkly.*) I've seen what I've seen!

PRINCESS (*Raising a drooping dahlia upon its stick*). Life?

NURSE. It's not for nothing I've gone about as I have!

PRINCESS. And you've no wish at all to settle down?

NURSE. It's all one to me!

PRINCESS (*tentatively*). I seek a porteress for a house of piety!

NURSE. That wouldn't suit me!

PRINCESS (*reassuring*). It's an easy enough position.

NURSE. A porter's place in a Sisterhood? (*Dryly.*) You call it settling down?

PRINCESS. Think it over!

NURSE. Let all have their latch-keys, and maybe I will.

SCENE 8

Same. REGGIE (*hatless, from house*)

REGGIE. I want to hide.

PRINCESS. Hide ?

REGGIE. I hadn't thought it possible (*breathlessly*) to meet so many wicked people at a Nursery Tea.

PRINCESS. Who have you run away from ?

REGGIE. A withered lily woman.

PRINCESS. There are so many withered lily women (*vaguely*). Here in Florence.

REGGIE (*saluting* CHARLES). Please, might I hold him, Nurse ?

NURSE. Certainly, sir !

REGGIE (*taking* CHARLES, *considering him*). He's such a profound-looking baby !

PRINCESS (*dreamily*). He has *an Ocean* of sleep upon him. . . .

NURSE. Oh, he's a little rascal !

REGGIE (*to* PRINCESS). I'm told you called me disreputable the other night !

PRINCESS. I'm sure I hardly recollect whether I called you reputable or disreputable—I don't remember.

REGGIE. Unkind.

PRINCESS (*motherly*). And how are our actual prospects ?

REGGIE (*candid*). If I'm a little disappointed at present I believe always in my own eventual star.

PRINCESS. That's right!

REGGIE. I'm hoping to be a Cardinal's secretary soon.

PRINCESS. *Are* you?

REGGIE. Nothing's quite decided—but I think I've got the job.

PRINCESS. You'll get awfully bored, shan't you, going to conversaziones in the religious world?

REGGIE (*resigned*). *Forse!*

PRINCESS. Until you assume your duties, I presume you'll remain in Florence?

REGGIE (*returning infant to* NURSE, *who parades slowly with it up and down*). Lord Orkish has asked me to make his house temporarily my home.

PRINCESS (*after an instant*). Is *Lady* Orkish coming out this year?

REGGIE. She's been.

PRINCESS. Been?

REGGIE. She only broke her journey on her way from Rome.

PRINCESS (*looking down while she speaks*). She didn't stay long.

REGGIE. Long enough!

PRINCESS. For Lord Orkish?

REGGIE (*with feeling*). It made my flesh *creep* to see him in the white custody of a wife.

PRINCESS (*with brio*). S-s-s-sh! For shame!

REGGIE. I admire the Old Bean! He wears his degradation brilliantly, as though it were *an Order*!

PRINCESS. He talked across me at dinner once and I've not forgiven him for it!

REGGIE. It's awful, I know, when he begins about "The Cabal that rose up against me!"

PRINCESS. Oh, I'm terrified of him then!

REGGIE (*perceiving* LORD ORKISH). And, it appears, here we have him.

(*Enter* LORD ORKISH.)

SCENE 9

Same. LORD ORKISH

LORD ORKISH. I've come as an emissary to say that tea is being served in the house.

PRINCESS. I don't want tea, thanks.

LORD ORKISH. Perhaps you'd care for an ice?

PRINCESS (*emphatic*). No.

REGGIE. Why do you say "No" in such a voice?

PRINCESS. Never mind.

LORD ORKISH. Lady Wilson-Philipson has just arrived with an octet of daughters like cabbage-roses—so large, so pink, so fresh.

(*Violins sound faintly from house.*)

REGGIE. It's going to be a crush!

PRINCESS. I think I'll go in, as Monsignor Vanhove may perhaps be in the drawing-room.

[*Exit* PRINCESS *to house.*

Scene 10

Lord Orkish, Reggie

Lord Orkish. I missed you in the Piazza.

Reggie. Mr Hope offered me a lift up in his carriage.

Lord Orkish (*Leering a little*). I wish people would offer *me* lifts.

Reggie (*amiable*). I'd as soon have walked.

Lord Orkish (*dropping into a seat*). Seen anything at all of his Eminence?

Reggie (*emotionally*). Not half-an-hour ago—in furs, and a soft tulle hat like an Oxford mist.

Lord Orkish. You didn't attack him?

Reggie (*shocked*). *Me?* How could I?

Lord Orkish. His pretensions to youth are a little ridiculous.

Reggie (*Seating himself on the ground*). The first time I went to the Villa—I shall never forget—I think the electric fan just kept me from fainting.

(*Enter* Angelo, *with a salver and ices.*)

Scene 11

Same. Angelo.

Lord Orkish (*refusing ice*). No, *grazie.*

Reggie. There is something mediæval to me in his appearance.

LORD ORKISH. Mediæval?

REGGIE (*refusing ice.*) It's his livery.

ANGELO (*smiling*). The Signora will be sad you do not like her ice.

REGGIE. What are they?

ANGELO. This lemon, this pistaccio——

REGGIE. And this?

ANGELO (*Languid*). *Chi lo sa?*

REGGIE (*venturing*). Shall I regret it?

LORD ORKISH (*to* ANGELO, *fixing him*). Were you ever in Naples?

ANGELO (*Languid*). Yes; oh yes.

LORD ORKISH. I seem to have seen you.

ANGELO (*displaying his teeth, smiling*). Via Tavolini!

LORD ORKISH. I daresay.

ANGELO. As a boy I vend flowers.

LORD ORKISH. Via Tavolini?

ANGELO. Now and then I would pose.

REGGIE. Pose?

ANGELO (*gazing indolently over his shoulder-knots*). I'm a model.

LORD ORKISH (*Ironic*). And so at last I behold a model footman!

ANGELO (*sighing*). *Ah, caro dio!*

LORD ORKISH. The perfect servant?

ANGELO (*smiling*). *Per Bacco!*

REGGIE. You prefer this to Naples?

ANGELO. No.

REGGIE. Nicer Naples.

ANGELO. I want to go to America.

LORD ORKISH. Why do you want to go to America?

ANGELO. *Chi lo sa?*

LORD ORKISH. Young rapscallion!

ANGELO (*rolling his eyes*). New York.

LORD ORKISH. What should you do in New York?

REGGIE. Yes (*rapping it out quickly*). And what were you doing under the Piazza della Signoria Colonnades the other night?

ANGELO. Piazza della Signoria?

REGGIE. In ambuscade.

ANGELO. *Niente.*

REGGIE (*sceptic*). *Niente?*

ANGELO (*Terrorised*). Ah, Jesu!

[*Exit* ANGELO, *to house.*

SCENE 12

LORD ORKISH, REGGIE

LORD ORKISH. It's a pity he's lost his master. Adrian would, of course, have trained him!

REGGIE. Where can he be—he and Eric?

LORD ORKISH. Nobody knows. Where the foxes say good-night to each other, I should think.

REGGIE. It must be a little *triste* for Mrs Sheil-Meyer.

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LORD ORKISH. She seems perfectly resigned.

(*Four or five small children emerge from house and scatter like butterflies behind the various bushes.*)

REGGIE. To-day she is receiving the felicitations of half Florence.

LORD ORKISH. *Davero.* So many *he's and she's* I never saw!

(*Enter the* MARCHESA PITTI-CONTI, *peering about as if looking for someone.*)

SCENE 13

Same. MARCHESA PITTI-CONTI

MARCHESA (*calling*). Dante, Dan-te Silvio Paolao. (*To* LORD ORKISH *and* REGGIE, *whimsically.*) He has left his mother, my little bundle of a boy. . . .

REGGIE. He can't be very far.

MARCHESA. A *bambino,* it seems, has captured his fancy. (*Peeping down among the dahlias.*) He is flirting something outrageously with the sweetest blonde.

LORD ORKISH. Yes?

MARCHESA. It is impossible to resist your English children.

LORD ORKISH (*paternal, trying to look less like a wolf*). Pretty, attractive tots——

MARCHESA (*gracious*). We Italian women, you know, have an inclination . . . an *inclination particulier* . . . (*a sigh*) for the English type!

LORD ORKISH. Ah, the English type ! But not the English climate ?

MARCHESA (*pronouncing every syllable crisply, distinctly*). Oh, come ! It is not so bad as it is painted. . . . I have some charming recollections of your country . . . of England. (*Sentimentally.*) Salisbury on a summer morning. . . . De-licious ! (*Introspective.*) I remember I was de-lighted—as well—with Bath. . . .

LORD ORKISH. One can hardly judge Great Britain from Salisbury and Bath.

REGGIE (*simpering*). Or even Stonehenge !

MARCHESA. I don't. (*Proudly.*) I have been much further than that. I have been in Oxford and in Cambridge. (*Beginning to gesticulate*). And into the Hebrides even—yes ! I have seen the modern Athens ! But no ! (*With a grimace.*) Also Abbotsford I was at. (*Ecstatic, cultured.*) Sir Valter Scott ! (*Recollecting herself.*) But Salisbury on a summer morning—Salisbury !

(*She drifts away, peering for her son among the dahlias as* ENID *comes down.*)

SCENE 14

Same. ENID. *Later, a little boy ; then* GLYDA

LORD ORKISH. The Marchesa is raving of the surpassing splendours of Salisbury.

REGGIE. Salisbury on a summer morning . . .

ENID. I suppose she's homesick. You know she was *née* Smith, and born in the Close.

LORD ORKISH. I didn't.

REGGIE (*irrepressible*). She is like a toy-terrier that bit me.

ENID. S-s-s-s-s-sh! Don't *say* such dreadful things.

REGGIE. Exactly.

ENID (*crossing to hammock and lifting up forgotten crystal, which she proceeds with hierarchic care to wipe*). They have a gorgeous place . . . near Verona . . . the Pitti-Contis . . . which is mortgaged to the last sod.

LORD ORKISH. What, gazing still?

REGGIE. There's a new man now in the town.

ENID. Oh? Really? You must give me his address.

REGGIE. He lives in the last house of a little mysterious street. You would never find the way.

LORD ORKISH. Have you seen anything yourself, Mrs Tresilian?

ENID (*Staring straight before her as though she were Cassandra*). To-day I saw a beautiful little giraffe.

LORD ORKISH. Queer.

ENID. Or a goat it may have been.

REGGIE (*yawning*). I had a morning dream—I saw goats.

ENID (*uninterested. Changing the subject*). In autumn, the garden is as melancholy as any churchyard.

LORD ORKISH. Oh, don't say so!

REGGIE. Now is the time for Vallombrosa.

ENID. The forest must be beautiful now. . . .

(*Enter, from behind a tree, a* CHILD.)

CHILD. Mother! Where is she?

ENID. I don't know, dear. . . . I expect she's in the house.

[*Exit* CHILD.

LORD ORKISH. Wasn't that Violet's boy?

ENID. Oh no . . . he's four—and has the air of a budding policeman.

(*Enter* GLYDA, *très affairé in a "Botticelli" frock.*)

GLYDA. Aren't you going in for any refreshment?

REGGIE. Thanks. I've already had an ice!

GLYDA (*to* ENID). The new American actress "Ondelette" has offered to recite.

REGGIE (*bored*). Oh?

GLYDA (*important*). *The Prayer of Akhnaton to the Sun.* . . .

LORD ORKISH. She gave it only lately at the Harkovs'.

REGGIE. And I heard her do it at the Villa White (*mimicking*), "Oh, Akhnaton! Akhnaton!"

ENID (*shrewdly*). I think the sunlight has gone to her head.

REGGIE (*taking crystal from* ENID). Let me see.

ENID. Be careful.

REGGIE (*consulting crystal*). A nigger! (*Shouts.*)

LORD ORKISH (*leaning over him*). Only *one*?

(LORD ORKISH *and* REGGIE *appear enthralled.*)

GLYDA. Mama has had to go to a private exhibition; but she's coming on.

ENID (*vague*). Of what?

GLYDA (*seating herself*). Of Pictures.

ENID. Oh.

GLYDA. Portraits . . . all by women. Carriera, Kauffman, Morisot, Le Brun——

ENID. *Fade,* I should think.

GLYDA (*arch*). It's such fun though in Italy, being a woman!

ENID. Why?

GLYDA. I don't know—but it's such fun!!

ENID. Well, you're only a little girl yet.

GLYDA. You should see the way I'm looked at.

ENID. Where?

GLYDA. Where! Oh, in the street—in church. The other day, in the railway-carriage coming back from Milan——

ENID. Well?

GLYDA (*confused*). A young officer—oh, how he stared. My goodness!

ENID. The Italians, I find, are very easily impressed.

GLYDA (*Ideal*). Love's a dose of heaven!

ENID. You modern girls are far too cute.

GLYDA (*after a hesitation*). I cannot resist telling you. . . . I've seen him again. . . .

ENID (*vague*). Who?

GLYDA. The Officer!

ENID. What is this craving after *orange-*

blossom? . . . They would persuade us it seems a woman's chief aim is a march to the altar.

GLYDA. He's deliciously dark—a regular raven, my dear.

ENID. What next?

GLYDA (*longingly*). Beautiful, Tall, and Mysterious Man!

ENID. Oh.

GLYDA (*tenderly*). It was in the Cascine . . .

ENID. He didn't speak?

GLYDA (*moved*). No . . . but as he came towards me it was like a *strain* of music.

(*Enter, from house,* NADINE, PRINCESS *and* MONSIGNOR VANHOVE.)

SCENE 15

Same. NADINE, PRINCESS *and* MONSIGNOR VANHOVE. *He is dressed in something subtly* chic; *he looks a lover of delicatessen.*

MONSIGNOR (*to* NADINE). Ah! Rome, Rome, in the days of Julia Farnese . . .

NADINE (*distrait*). I suppose it must have been.

PRINCESS (*to* ENID). Come here, dear, and be introduced. . . . I want you to know each other.

NADINE (*to* LORD ORKISH *and* REGGIE). They're dancing the *farandole.* Quick and choose your partner.

LORD ORKISH (*Objecting*). My dancing days are over quite.

NADINE (*taking him and* REGGIE *up stage*). I'll not believe it!

[*Exeunt* LORD ORKISH *and* REGGIE *to house.* (*Re-enter* NURSE *and infant, accompanied by a squadron of small children. She holds a story-book. Crossing to pillared circle, she seats herself sedately below the Virgin with the children grouped about her.* GLYDA *shortly joins them.*)

SCENE 16

ENID, PRINCESS, MONSIGNOR VANHOVE, *then* NADINE

PRINCESS. And so the Pope lends his authority!

MONSIGNOR (*twirling his thumbs*). We have his prayers, his wishes.

PRINCESS. His prayers, his wishes!

ENID. What could you want more, dearest?

PRINCESS (*Holding out her hand to her—the one with the muff*). You dear girl—and Nadine!

ENID (*sublime*). She would never leave her child.

MONSIGNOR (*significantly*). Whoever doth not take up the cross and follow Me, cannot be My disciple.

PRINCESS (*with feeling*). My dear Monsignor.

MONSIGNOR. And isn't it so?

PRINCESS (*Exalted, audacious*). I never wanted a child, I think, till now.

ENID (*frivolous, laughing*). Will you not be such a cynic.

PRINCESS. My dear, I mean it.

ENID (*in an undertone*). Peculiar devotion . . .

PRINCESS. And what is going on down in Rome?

MONSIGNOR. Few functions . . .

PRINCESS. It's full early yet.

MONSIGNOR (*Blinking*). There was a ball the other evening at the Grand Hotel.

PRINCESS. Oh, whose?

MONSIGNOR. The Longfields'.

PRINCESS. I hear she, Lady Longfield, is working havoc amongst the Cardinals, with her copper hair, large moist eyes and liquid voice.

MONSIGNOR. And she also subscribes to everything.

PRINCESS. It makes one feel so jealous.

MONSIGNOR (*suave*). You are not forgotten.

PRINCESS. No?

MONSIGNOR. Cardinal Ventifiore very often speaks of you.

PRINCESS. He took me round Trastevere once. It stands out vividly in my mind like *a first infidelity*.

MONSIGNOR. And Dom Jonquil too.

PRINCESS. I remember him, a great jaded-looking boy, almost as pale as the young man in St Mark's who shows one the Pallo d'Oro.

ENID (*deliberatingly*). I suppose, Zena, a long grey tangle of a veil?

PRINCESS. Where?

ENID. I was thinking of our uniforms.

PRINCESS. All that, of course, is in my prospectus.

NADINE (*coming down*). Monsignor Vanhove!

Is it true they intend to build a new Embassy? The front *quite* windowless, the back *all* glass?

MONSIGNOR (*Blinking*). It's the first I've heard of it.

NURSE (*Serenely reading*). "Then the wicked witch smeared her little limbs with ram's-grease and twisted her round three times! In a trice, the walls of the humble cottage fell away, and the palace appeared before them."

PRINCESS. Who told you, Nadine, about the Embassy?

NADINE. Mr Hope.

PRINCESS. What should "Tozhy" know?

NADINE (*looking round*). I'm so nervous of him. Since his exile here he has become a sort of public loofah.

NURSE (*continuing—on the crest of her tale*). "From that same minute the princess determined to follow the dictates of her heart, and refused to listen any longer to the worldly maxims of the King and Queen."

MONSIGNOR. Ah, sweet innocents!

NADINE (*indicating a child*). See that little gollywog there? . . . She's the Pontiff's niece.

ENID. Oh?

NADINE. The Pope is her uncle.

MONSIGNOR. She will become florid in time, like her mother.

PRINCESS (*glancing towards the tree-tops*). Hark to the birds! How happy they must be. *Singing, singing, singing.* Nearer to heaven than *we* are!

(*Enter* BLANCHE NEGRESS.)

Scene 17

Same. Blanche. *She is wearing a tailor-made "Redfern" and a man's cravat.*

Blanche. I've come to know if I may enrol myself?

Princess. Eh?

Blanche. I happened to hear you're starting a Sisterhood—not *too* strait-laced; and I wish to offer myself as a probationer.

Princess. Certainly; if you've any Vocation at all!

Blanche. My work is over in the world, you see. I have nothing to fight for now.

Princess. Are you even giving up your pen?

Blanche (*confused*). No . . . but hotels and lodgings *are* such noisy places.

Princess (*doubtfully*). I see . . .

Blanche (*rather wildly*). Noise! Noise! Noise!

Princess. But are there no quiet rooms, back rooms, in back hotels—and in back places?

Blanche (*Tragically*). I hate a silence that isn't *real.*

Princess (*graciously*). Well, in the cypress-alleys of our Anchorage, I trust you will find inspiration.

(*Enter* Lady Rocktower.)

Blanche. I'm sure I shall; I feel it.

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Scene 18

Same. Lady Rocktower

Lady Rocktower. I was obliged to go to the P.V. of the women-artists.

Nadine (*offering hand*). I adore Private Views!

Lady Rocktower. This was *so* dull.

Princess. Everybody's here!

Lady Rocktower. Some things are such an index. (*Intensely.*) Violet is parting with her *Rosalba*. . . .

Nadine. I wonder why?

Princess. She's become so mercenary. She seems to have now a sort of *hunger* for money.

Enid. Disgusting!

Lady Rocktower. I fancy she gives it . . .

Monsignor (*Alert*). Ah?

Lady Rocktower (*in an undertone*). To a tall, dark man in the Pope's body-guard!

Blanche (*breathlessly*). I suppose her lover?

Monsignor. In my opinion, a woman may accept the consolations of Bacchus as soon as accept a lover.

Princess. Do you really think she may?

Enid. Still every now and then one's face needs transforming. And Love does it better than anything else!

Monsignor. It depends, my child, upon the *sort*.

PRINCESS. I suppose when one's husband is fifty-seven . . .

LADY ROCKTOWER. My dear, even a man of fifty-seven is better than nothing at all.

BLANCHE. I don't agree.

LADY ROCKTOWER. No?

BLANCHE. I've been married, you know, too. Yet I sometimes think the simple comfort of a hot-water bottle . . .

PRINCESS (*laughing*). Well, I'm going to speak to the Wilson-Philipsons! I see Vicky over there.

(*A few persons emerge from house as if to enjoy the scene, which begins to take on the aspect of sunset.*)

BLANCHE. I mean to be off-hand with her. She translates everyone into terms of colour, and I hear she called me a dirty white.

NADINE. She's *guapa*, as they say in Spain!

LADY ROCKTOWER. Poor things, they live, no one quite knows how.

ENID. I passed them all the other evening in a covered bullock-cart in the Viale dei Colli.

NADINE. Oh?

ENID. I just *moaned* for joy! The big tears rolling!

(*Re-enter* MARCHESA PITTI-CONTI *with her son* DANTE. *He is sobbing. He has evidently been misbehaving himself. The* MARCHESA *seems furious—her English is perfect.*)

Scene 19

Same. Plus Marchesa *and* Dante Silvio Paolao

Dante (*sobbing*). Boo-oo-oo ! Ow-ow-ow !

Marchesa. Did not your father give you the choice, wicked little boy (*pinching him*), of Oxford, Cambridge, Salamanca, Utrecht, Harvard, Glasgow, Edinburgh or Heidelberg ?

Dante. Boo-oo-oo !

Lady Rocktower (*turning*). Are you thinking of sending him to school ?

Marchesa. Ah, *chère madame . . . !*

Lady Rocktower. *Il est gentil ce grand gosse.* (*To* Enid.) *Je trouve qu'il est en train de devenir charmant.*

Enid. *N'est-ce pas ?*

Marchesa (*to* Blanche). *Bonjour, chère amie.*

Blanche (*all there*). *Comme va ?*

Marchesa. *Bene ; grazie-é lé ?*

Blanche (*all there still*). *Benissimo !*

Lady Rocktower. To what school—*a che scuola* —shall you send him ?

Marchesa (*Very foreign*). I do not know.

Lady Rocktower. School, in my time, was not the soft place it is to-day.

Marchesa. No ?

Lady R. As a young girl I used to be whipped with furze.

Marchesa (*Appalled*). Ah, *chère madame . . .*

Lady Rocktower (*cheerfully, rearranging the back of her dress*). I was all gorse-marks often !

(*Re-enter* Lord Orkish.)

Scene 20

Same. Plus Lord Orkish

Lord Orkish. Young Astix is in the loggia.

Nadine. Is he?

Lord Orkish. People are making such a fuss.

Nadine. Absurd. His slender volume of verses, you could pass it under the door. . . .

Lord Orkish (*with indifference*). I dare say.

Nadine. Why aren't you dancing?

Lord Orkish. I'm too old.

Nadine. Or too lazy, which!

Monsignor. At the fall, Florence tends to make one sluggish.

Lady Rocktower. Yes; the autumn here is certainly enervating. Only this very morning I said to Dr Mater, in the Boboli Gardens: "I have that *tired* feeling, Doctor, again," I said; "and I can't think what it can be." "Oh, Lady Rocktower," he said to me, with his piercing glance, "I assure you it's nothing but the change of season."

Monsignor. Exactly.

Lady Rocktower. I'll be glad, though, I confess, for Lord Rocktower's sake, when winter sets in.

Lord Orkish. And how is my old pal Harry?

Lady Rocktower. We all thought him passing out a day or two ago. Doctor Mater told me—but oh, so sweetly, oh, so gently—he could do nothing more, when suddenly he sat up and asked for

lobster soup. Lobster soup! There was none in the house, but within an hour the soup was made —and he was saved!

LORD ORKISH. Bravo!

LADY ROCKTOWER. Every time I let the Villa he seems to quite give way. (*With a sigh of resignation.*) Lord Rocktower loves Florence and he loathes leaving it. . . .

LORD ORKISH. I don't wonder.

MARCHESA (*to* DANTE, *who is making grimaces at the Pope's niece*). *Ma che, ma che!*

ENID (*to* DANTE). Come, and I will gather you a few dahlias.

(*She takes* MARCHESA *and* DANTE *up stage towards a flower-plat, while* NADINE *and* MONSIGNOR *cross to pillared circle where* NURSE *is seated.* BLANCHE *during progress of scene has joined the little group which is watching sunset.*)

LORD ORKISH. I suppose, if Mrs Sheil-Meyer withdraws from Society, the *next* villa to let will be this!

LADY ROCKTOWER. I've no patience at all with her if she does.

LORD ORKISH. The Princess Zoubaroff can be very persuasive.

LADY ROCKTOWER (*with rigour*). It's all very fine for Zena, who is no longer in her Springtime, to retire. Six husbands must have left her with the minimum of a heart! But for a young and pretty woman like Nadine Sheil-Meyer to give up the world, it's another matter.

LORD ORKISH. Mrs Tresilian is sure to follow suit!

LADY ROCKTOWER. *Que de sottises!*

LORD ORKISH. From sympathy.

LADY ROCKTOWER. She trifles—she truffles—but I can't think she will.

LORD ORKISH (*sententious*). The Princess is one of those who, when they cast their spell——

LADY ROCKTOWER. I always stick up for Zena Zoubaroff. I don't believe *half* I hear about her! Although I daresay a *good deal* is true!

(*They both laugh.*)

LORD ORKISH. It's a pity their husbands can't appear just to bring them to their bearing.

(*The* Farandole *is heard.*)

LADY ROCKTOWER. Oh, they're coming out!

SCENE 21

General

Children, hand in hand, emerge from House. Making a ring, they proceed to dance about the garden Temple.

LORD ORKISH. Youth, youth.

PRINCESS (*approaching*). I feel I want to dance!

LADY ROCKTOWER. My dear Zena!

PRINCESS. I've had Austrian Waltzes whirling through my head all day.

(REGGIE *is seen in the background pirouetting with* MR ASTIX, *the author—a wild young man who looks like the Publishers' Ruin.*)

LADY ROCKTOWER. Oh . . . look at Reggie.

LORD ORKISH (*moved*). Dear, dear boy.

MONSIGNOR (*coming forward, benign*). Everywhere delicious innocence!

PRINCESS (*Boxing,* con amore, *with her muff each little girl upon the ears as she goes by*). Nun! Nun! Nun!

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT III

Scene 1

Same scene. A few of the trees have shed their leaves. It is Winter. Through the bare branches of the Judas-tree a calvary is visible at the extremity of the garden.

As the curtain rises, Nurse *is seen strolling to and fro, exercising baby in his pram.*

Angelo *follows at her heels, singing strenuously to the guitar.*

Nurse *and* Infant, Angelo

Nurse. You young Italians are all passion.

Angelo (*rhapsodically, carolling*). Tral-li-lal-la!

Nurse. Not so loud, you'll wake the child. (*She takes from the pram a flask of Lachryma Christi and drinks.*)

Angelo. *Sapristi?*

Nurse. My favourite vintage! Plenty of body . . .

Angelo. *Ah, che roba!*

Nurse. Yes, you Italians are dangerous fellows. . . . (*Sentimentally.*) You make me think of Dudley, Lord Bellforest's under-butler, long ago. (*Drinks.*) Ah, I've been a buxom woman in my day, dear. . . .

A little bit of proper *simpatico* I was! And I'm good-enough yet, honey. . . . Some constitutions are just like this (*Drinking*) they improve with time. (*Falling into reflection.*) She was forty-nine years old when she had me—my dear mother. And then there were two after that.

ANGELO (*shrugging*). *Che volete?*

NURSE (*cogent*). Which is more than most of them could say (or do), your Tuscan Signoras!

ANGELO (*indignant*). I am not Tuscan myself at all. (*Strumming his guitar.*) My home is in the South. Ah *bella* Taormina!

NURSE (*Sentimentally*). Well; it's all South to me, dear.

ANGELO (*shrugging*). *Per Bacco.*

NURSE. This is South all right for me (*returning flask to pram*).

ANGELO (*yawning*). How dull it is—*ah, dio.*

NURSE. It's quiet enough, it's true, now the mistress has gone.

ANGELO. *Povera!*

NURSE. I like a place, I must say, where there's a bit of life. When I was with the Hon. Mrs Cortez, there was company if you like! Valets, chauffeurs, Parisian maids . . . gracious powers, you could take your choice. It was in her establishment (*sighs*) I met my Albert.

ANGELO. Albert?

NURSE. Mr Mangrove—my *sposo*!

(*She sighs several times heavily.*)

ANGELO (*with morbid interest*). And was he *tutto . . . tutto . . .* ?

NURSE (*nodding*). *Tutto, tutto!* That is to say, my dear, I never could bear him but in the one capacity. . . . For, he never had any mind; or any understanding. . . . What was he (*snaps her fingers*) but that ! !

ANGELO. Ah.

NURSE (*Archly winking*). But in the one capacity love he was unexcelled.

(*Baby begins to require attention.*)

(*Enter* REGGIE *from roadway.*)

SCENE 2

Same. REGGIE

REGGIE (*dapper, smiling*). I blew in only to say good-morning to little Charles.

NURSE. That's very kind of you, sir. (*Raising baby.*) Sit up and say good-morning to Mr Quintus !

REGGIE. He's a fine child, Nurse.

NURSE. He's a little beauty, sir, as I'm his sainted-nanny ! (*Confidential.*) They won't have him inside the convent, heaven protect us, for fear he'd flurry the nuns !

REGGIE. Will you kiss me, Charles ?

NURSE. Kiss the gentleman. . . .

REGGIE. That's right.

NURSE. See how he's laughing.

REGGIE. The rogue! I fear he's a rogue, Nurse.

NURSE. He's a fine fellow.

REGGIE. No morals!!! He has no morals, I fear. . . .

NURSE. Oh! Why, sir, why now?

REGGIE. Born in Florence, a boy very rarely has.

NURSE. Don't be hard on Florence, Mr Quintus, it's not near so fast, I'm sure, as San Francisco.

REGGIE. I wonder?

ANGELO (*wistfully*). Ah, America . . .

REGGIE. Still keen as ever on visiting the States?

ANGELO (*with all the languor of "the South"*). Yes; oh yes.

REGGIE (*twinkling mysteriously*). Before you go, I must give you a letter of introduction to a multi-millionaire—who's rather a friend of mine! —in Memphis, Tennessee.

ANGELO (*delighted*). *Tanti grazie!*

REGGIE. *Niente.*

(*The bell tinkles. Murmuring his gratitude,* ANGELO *answers the garden-gate, after which he exits to house.*)

(*Enter, from roadway,* BLANCHE.)

Scene 3

Same. Blanche. *She looks hot and dishevelled. She bears a sack. She is dressed as a Nun. She gives one the impression rather of an escaped peacock.*

Blanche (*dropping her sack*). They sent me to wait here, with the victuals. (*Groaning.*) Out at Monte Serravizza there isn't a thing.

Reggie. What? Are they coming up to the Villa to-day?

Blanche. Yes.

(Nurse, *on hearing this intelligence, briefly withdraws.*)

Reggie. The whole cortège?

Blanche (*seating herself, mopping her brow*). We came into Florence—shopping, or begging—God knows which . . .

Reggie (*amused*). A bit of both, I expect.

Blanche. My wretched nerves; has Baccio Bertucci been?

Reggie. Baccio Bertucci?

Blanche. He promised.

Reggie (*mystified*). What?

Blanche (*occult*). It can't be helped. I suppose we must go without.

Reggie. Your Abbess, I'm told, is quite scoring as a Saint.

Blanche (*irritated*). Tsch! Who said so?

Reggie. The Rocktowers.

BLANCHE (*Intensely*). Life at Monte Serravizza is quite indescribable.

REGGIE. It must be wonderful.

BLANCHE. It's nothing but backbiting from morning to night.

REGGIE. Oh!

BLANCHE. The violence of religious jealousy, I know of nothing at all that can match it.

REGGIE. Violence?

BLANCHE. Zena's becoming much too tyrannical.

REGGIE (*Perching himself on a garden-chair*). Remember, these small sub-lunar trials will one day pass!

BLANCHE. I hope so, I'm sure.

REGGIE. Poor Mrs Negress.

BLANCHE. To-day—as we were coming into Florence—I arranged my side hair (*simpering*) experimentally, and she was *furious*. What are you doing with *those whiskers*? she said to me. I won't have any whiskers here, arousing our thoughts. . . .

REGGIE. Oh. . . .

BLANCHE. While her head was scrubbed but yesterday with henna.

REGGIE. She was shampooed you say with henna!

BLANCHE (*stalking up and down, swaying her skirts from side to side like a Spanish dancer*). And only the day before she ordered herself a crystal cincture from Paris.

REGGIE (*tossing his hat*). *Olé, Olé.*

BLANCHE. Thoughts, indeed!

REGGIE (*admiringly*). Nobody can do outrageous things so naturally as she can!

BLANCHE. I admit she's clever. She hushed up the affair of May Winterbottom most successfully.

REGGIE (*awed*). There's been a scandal?

BLANCHE. A scandal!! The very night the first new novice arrived——

REGGIE. Well?

BLANCHE. Zena smelt smoke. Heavy smoke. All the corridors full of it, coming from the sister's cell. She went to her door and oh the horror.

REGGIE (*Breathless*). What?

BLANCHE. May Winterbottom was smoking Opium.

REGGIE. Pouf!

BLANCHE. Yes.

REGGIE (*rising carelessly*). If the Princess should want a Pinturricchio for her chapel, by the way, I know where there's one to be found.

BLANCHE. Indeed.

REGGIE. An "*Iaokannan.*"

BLANCHE. Oh!

REGGIE. Or, I know of a topping Tintoret.

BLANCHE. Thanks . . . but I fancy she's on the scent of a *Sainte Famille* herself.

REGGIE. I'd give a good deal for a permit of inspection!

BLANCHE (*Abysmal*). There's no bathroom yet in the convent . . . you just get caught in the rain. . . .

REGGIE. Disgusting !

BLANCHE (*with a battered smile*). One of the few drawbacks.

REGGIE (*looking at his watch*). Well, I must go. I have to meet Lord Orkish in the town.

(*Exit* REGGIE *through garden-gate. Re-enter, at same moment,* NURSE *from house.*)

NURSE. Perhaps you'd prefer, m'm, to rest inside ?

BLANCHE. I'm quite happy here.

NURSE. You don't look so, m'm.

BLANCHE. No ?

NURSE (*brightly*). The Religious Life, it's not for everybody !

BLANCHE. No.

NURSE (*confidential*). She tried to coax me into it. . . . But I didn't feel the call.

BLANCHE. My work was over in the world, you see. I had nothing to fight for. (*To* ENID, *who enters.*) I thought you were *never* coming.

SCENE 4

Enter from roadway ENID, *followed by* NADINE *and* PRINCESS. NADINE *runs to baby's pram.* PRINCESS (*she holds a tortoiseshell-cat, like an unhappy " Society " woman, in her arms*) *hovers a moment speaking to someone outside the gate.*

They look very pale, slim and Isis-like in their grain-coloured Nuns' toilettes.

ENID (*coming down*). Sorry to be late, old girl.

BLANCHE (*mortified*). Old girl . . .

ENID. We've been getting ribbons for Monte—such a subtle old flowered-velvet, and yards and yards and *yards* of green Georgette . . .

BLANCHE (*aggrieved, staring at her sack*). What for ?

ENID (*Airily*). Decoration.

PRINCESS (*in great good-humour*). To-day, as a special treat, we're going back by auto !

BLANCHE. Hallelujah.

PRINCESS. Did you do all my little commissions ?

BLANCHE. All except the candles.

PRINCESS. Tiresome.

ENID. You look hot.

BLANCHE. My face must be a looking-glass.

PRINCESS. Not that.

BLANCHE. Had that dreadful sack weighed much more I think I should have fainted.

PRINCESS (*a little guilty, excusing herself*). My dear, I'm desolate you should have had to carry it at all about the streets, but what *could* I do ?

BLANCHE (*containing herself*). Reggie Quintus has just gone.

PRINCESS. Really ? And I had wanted to see him.

BLANCHE. He was telling me of a Tintoret, or something.

ENID (*nodding*). He's rather a judge.

NADINE (*Leaning over pram, sorrowfully, to her son*). My poor pigeon . . . I warn you to expect nothing very much from life.

PRINCESS. What makes her so oppressed?

ENID. She's chagrined a little because I said her habit made her look hunched.

BLANCHE (*Critically*) .Distorted. And so it does!

ENID. And she was dreaming again of Adrian.

PRINCESS. Once I get a decent cook she'll not have these nightmares.

(BLANCHE *draws away a little, joining* NADINE.)

ENID. I'm so glad I'm not haunted with Eric!

PRINCESS (*Angelic, virtuous*). May white dreams attend you always, dear. Amen.

ENID (*Earnestly*). Amen.

PRINCESS (*Catching marvellously her breath, as if her spirit, freed, had shot from earth to heaven, and from heaven* (*back again*) *to earth*). Ah!

ENID. Blanche seems nervy to-day.

PRINCESS (*fluttered, breathless yet*). Yes; unstrung. . . .

ENID. She says she feels "jumpy."

PRINCESS (*with sudden brusqueness*). Can you wonder her nerves are what they are when she's sipping alternative coffee and tea from seven in the morning to twelve at night?

(*Enter from house,* LADY ROCKTOWER.)

Scene 5

Same. Lady Rocktower. *She looks slightly embarrassed: her face is a trifle red. She is wearing the Family-pearls. She has a hole in her veil.*

Lady Rocktower. I saw you go by and guessed you'd be here.

(Enid *retreats.*)

Princess (*kissing her* à la Sainte Thérèse). My dear Lady Rocktower?

Lady Rocktower (*Clutching her pearls*). I've come only to know if, dear—by *any* chance—you could take my daughter in.

Princess (*stiffening*). Take her in?

Lady Rocktower. Receive her.

Princess. As a novice?

Lady Rocktower. For a time.

Princess (*Uncomfortable, suspicious*). I fear she'd not be happy at Monte Serravizza; I fear our austerities—our Rule—everything!

Lady Rocktower (*candid, frank*). Glyda's so difficult and so giddy, and it's precisely for that.

Princess (*Ethereal, exquisite*). I was once heedless too!

Lady Rocktower. I would like to marry my daughter straight from your Convent-door.

Princess (*still evasive*). Marry her?

Lady Rocktower (*with much dignity*). Well—*une grande mariage!*

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PRINCESS (*reassured a little*). But . . . could one manage her?

LADY ROCKTOWER. I am sure you could. And oh (*her voice breaks*), I should be so grateful.

PRINCESS. From what you say, I gather she's given her heart to someone.

LADY ROCKTOWER (*Making a clean breast of it*). Poor child, she thinks herself in love with a young Italian lieutenant . . . though I thank God on my knees, dear Zena, she has scarcely caught a glimpse of his shadow . . . !

PRINCESS. You're certain of that?

LADY ROCKTOWER. Positive.

PRINCESS. I'll come over one morning and have a quiet chat with Glyda—she and I, quite cosy! (*Laughing a little.*) Although really, I'm most awfully busy at present with my liqueur.

LADY ROCKTOWER. What liqueur?

PRINCESS. I'm inventing a delightfully potent liqueur to be made by the nuns. The Holy Father (*rippling*) was quite charmed with the few distilled drops I sent. He pretends . . . he pretends it will inspire him for Life!

LADY ROCKTOWER. Yes?

PRINCESS. We mean to call it yellow-ruin. . . .

LADY ROCKTOWER. I had an audience—my fifth!—only the other day.

PRINCESS. My dear, you're always trotting to Rome!

LADY ROCKTOWER. I adore it in Winter.

PRINCESS. Is there lots and lots going on?

LADY ROCKTOWER. The usual thing, there's been a function at the Quirinal which was dull, and another at the Embassy, which was worse . . . and *apropos* of recent Diplomacy, Lady Winifred Wheeler has just presented Sir Walter Wheeler with a black child. Such a commotion as there's been over it all.

PRINCESS (*horror-struck*). Black?

LADY ROCKTOWER. Well, dear, dark; but, *oh*, so dark!

PRINCESS (*laughing*). And the du Wilsons are just starting a Nursery, too.

LADY ROCKTOWER. Poor little Violet . . . ! She made me such a wan, sensitive smile in the street just now.

PRINCESS. She seems to think she should be asked to paint herself for the Uffizzi. (*Hilarious.*) Really, I never saw such cheeks!

LADY ROCKTOWER. No; nor I. (*Laughing, going.*) Look in Thursday at the Villa, if you're able. (*Persuasively.*) Sonino is singing . . .

PRINCESS. Sonino? Oh, when Sonino sings, one visualises everything one wishes!

LADY ROCKTOWER. She is to throw in her sob of love, and sing three solos, for a special charge.

PRINCESS. It's hard indeed to refuse, but we *never* go out at night. . . .

LADY ROCKTOWER. This once! Oh, and I nearly forgot, I wanted to ask you for that choice receipt. Cocks' combs . . . ?

PRINCESS. And the hearts of artichokes!

LADY ROCKTOWER. (*smiling, committing it to memory*). *And the hearts of artichokes!*

PRINCESS (*Impressively*). Crush well.

LADY ROCKTOWER. A more delicious dish . . . you must give it me when I come to you—the days I visit Glyda.

PRINCESS (*Leaning on* LADY ROCKTOWER'S *arm, and accompanying her towards the gate*). I'm allowing the novices on feast days to receive their friends in a charming cognac chiffon.

LADY ROCKTOWER. You all look so interesting, as it is!

PRINCESS (*very much pleased*). Do we?

LADY ROCKTOWER. I almost envy you. . . .

PRINCESS. Dear Lady Rocktower, perhaps some day——

LADY ROCKTOWER (*as she goes out*). Who knows? A husband's often a strain, and mine's not a world-loving nature very.

SCENE 6

Same. Minus LADY ROCKTOWER

NADINE (*advancing — during* LADY ROCKTOWER'S *visit she has withdrawn from view behind a tree*). And how has he kept, Nurse, all the week?

NURSE. Well as could be, thank you, marm.

NADINE. Poor spirit—!

NURSE. Oh, he's a little rascal!

NADINE. His little laugh does one good.

ENID (*Quizzingly*). He's a remarkably hideous child. Like a remarkably hideous duck . . .

PRINCESS (*Abbessish*). Prioress! Prioress!

ENID (*dancing mischievously about the pram*). Who ever had such a wobbly chin? Or such a nervous, uncertain nose?

NADINE. He's like his father!

ENID. Ugly . . . ugly . . . like papa.

NURSE (*crooningly*). *Where's Daddy? ? ?*

(*Enter, from garden-gate,* ADRIAN *and* ERIC. *They both are looking wonderfully recouped and rejuvenated—as though their extensive holiday had done them good. Which has benefited from his freedom most—which looks the handsomer—it is not easy to determine.*)

NADINE. When he starts pummelling the air with his little pinkie-winkie fists, with his little dimpled doigts, whatever can it be? I know he wants something. . . .

ADRIAN. Probably *his Father!*

(*Slow-music: A short Intermezzo* (*of a particularly "cloying" nature*) *coming from the Orchestra, concludes the scene.*)

SCENE 7

Same. ADRIAN, ERIC

NADINE (*the Intermezzo ended, very calmly through the hood of the pram*). Oh, Adrian, so you have come back!

ADRIAN. As you see.

ENID (*to* ERIC). You might have given us a sign.

ERIC (*shortly*). 'Drian's been ill—we were unwilling to alarm you.

ENID (*with biting satire*). Alarm us!

ADRIAN. Do you remember how scared you were in Egypt once?

NADINE. I can't say I do.

ADRIAN. There's no use to cut up rough.

NADINE (*trenchantly*). You're unwanted.

ENID. Quite unwanted!

PRINCESS (*interposing*). Your wives are Dedicated!

ADRIAN. I beg your pardon?

ENID (*to* NADINE). Don't they jar.

ERIC (*catching her by the veil*). Lor' lummie, what's this?

ENID (*furious*). Don't touch me!

ERIC (*assertive*). That's as *I* choose.

ENID (*freeing herself*). Oh, the horrid man—he hit me.

PRINCESS. He *hit* you?

BLANCHE (*wailing*). Sacrilege!

ENID (*smacking* ERIC *smartly with her rosary*). Ah! Monster!

NURSE (*panting*). Well, I never.

(ANGELO *appears.*)

NADINE (*Crucified*). S-s-s-sh! Avoid a *scena* before the servants.

ERIC. Aie. . . .

BLANCHE (*hysterically*). Oh! This is awful.

ANGELO (*Announcing*). The auto . . .

ENID (*quietly, threatening him with her scourge*). Oh, Eric . . . don't exasperate me more!

NADINE (*with the upturned glance of a martyr*). I refuse to wrangle.

PRINCESS (*inviolate, evoking calvary*). Come!

ENID (*doing a little picturesque skirmishing*). Beast!

ERIC. The bitch bit me.

BLANCHE (*Picking up her sack and making for the gate*). My knees refuse to carry me.

NADINE. Yes. Let's go.

ADRIAN (*indifferent*). As you please!

NURSE (*to* NADINE). *I wish to give warning!*

NADINE (*callous*). Very well.

PRINCESS (*to* NADINE *and* ENID). Come, chicks!

NADINE (*in her vividest voice*). Mind the *step*, Zena.

PRINCESS (*turning defiantly at gate*). The Vatican shall hear of this!

[*Exeunt* PRINCESS, NADINE *and* ENID.

SCENE 8

ADRIAN, ERIC

ADRIAN (*dropping into a chair*). I thought perhaps we should find they'd remarried or something, but I'll be cursed if I thought they'd console themselves as they have!

ERIC (*at pram*). The boy must be yours?

ADRIAN (*blushing, confused*). I *suppose* I'm his father. . . .

ERIC. What on earth are you going to do with the little beggar ?

ADRIAN. I shall look out for a school for him to-morrow.

ERIC. No, really, Adrian ?

ADRIAN (*loftily*). I shall set at once about his education.

ERIC (*bending over pram*). Isn't he just too fat for anything !

(*The outside bell is heard to ring.*)

ADRIAN. What's that ?

ERIC (*uneasily*). My God, if they should have returned. . . .

(*Re-enter* ANGELO. *He saunters languidly over to garden-door.*)

(*Voice of* LORD ORKISH, *off.*) I must have missed Mr Quintus : and I know he comes here most days to play with the child.

(*Voice of* ANGELO, *off.*) The Master has come home !

LORD ORKISH (*entering*). What ?

SCENE 9

SAME. LORD ORKISH

ADRIAN (*surprised*). Henry . . . !

LORD ORKISH (*considerably moved, proffering his hand*). My dear, dear fellow.

ERIC. Henry ?

(*Under the peculiar circumstances, they very nearly all embrace.*)

LORD ORKISH (*wonder-struck*). And how amazingly fit you look: you seem to have grown much younger.

ERIC (*smiling*). We've had a top-hole time! 'Drian was seedy, though, at first.

ADRIAN. Nothing at all to speak of!

ERIC. I *refused* to let him die.

ADRIAN (*nodding*). Eric soon nursed me round!

LORD ORKISH. And your estimable wives—you've heard of them, of course.

ADRIAN. Yes, and seen them too—what's more!

ERIC (*hilarious*). They must have passed you. They went off in a taxi, a snug half-dozen.

LORD ORKISH. What? They've gone? They've left you? . . .

ADRIAN. Apparently.

ERIC. It's all I can do to believe it.

LORD ORKISH (*With feeling*). Lucky chaps.

ERIC. Delicious to be so dispossessed . . .

LORD ORKISH (*leering a little*). Well, they're not the first to come to Florence to turn themselves into prudes!

ADRIAN (*pointedly*). As *you* very well know, dear Harry.

LORD ORKISH. I take it you'll live apart, as we do—Lady Orkish and I—by "mutual consent."

ERIC. Yes. "Mutual consent."

LORD ORKISH. No odious fuss.

ERIC. I hope not.

LORD ORKISH. I assure you, after the first day I never missed Bella.

ERIC (*Stretching luxuriously his arms*). To be free, to be single ! ! !

ADRIAN (*addressing rapturously the garden*). Dear lawn. My own beautiful trees.

LORD ORKISH. He's enchanted to be home. (*Sighing.*) Well, there's no spot on earth to compare with Florence !

(*The outside bell is heard to ring again.* ANGELO *answers it as before. Enter a tiny boy in buttons. He has with him a faggot of huge Church candles.*)

SCENE 10

SAME. ANGELO, BOY

ANGELO (*having ascertained the boy's business. To Adrian*). He come from the Church-furnishers in Borgo Santi Apostoli.

ADRIAN. From where ?

ANGELO. From Baccio Bertucci's. . . .

ADRIAN (*sharply, to boy*). Be off with you.

ANGELO. He say the Signora order the candles !

ADRIAN. Tell him to hook it.

ANGELO (*clapping his hands*). A Monte Serravizza—*la giù.*

ERIC (*pointing, in desperation*). *La giù, la giù.*

ANGELO. *Và, và.*

LORD ORKISH (*patting the child's head*). Run away, there's a good little sinner.

[*Exeunt boy, followed by* ANGELO.

Scene II

Lord Orkish, Eric, Adrian, Infant, *then* Angelo

Adrian. The Eleusinian priestesses weren't in it!

Lord Orkish. Have you formed yet any plans?

Adrian. I shall stop here. It will amuse me infinitely to see what they'll do!

Lord Orkish (*flippantly*). I shouldn't wonder much if they weren't back in Lewis hats and diamonds before to-night.

Eric (*terrified at the idea*). Oh don't . . . if Enid puts in an appearance again, I shall take the first express to Rome.

Adrian. You're safe enough, Eric; *Enid has no ties.*

Eric. No ties?

Adrian (*with a touch of conceit*). She isn't a mother!

Lord Orkish. It must take an exceptionally "good" woman to forsake husband, son, friends, society, to follow the Way of the Cross.

Adrian. It's quite on the cards that Nadine was only bored. Besides, she hasn't deserted her *friends* at all. I believe but for Princess Zoubaroff she'd be here now.

Eric. The Princess seems to have fairly bewitched them!

Lord Orkish (*humming pensively to himself*). With a hey-ho-hey, and a nonny.

Adrian. You're right.

LORD ORKISH. I wish she'd rake in Bella.

ADRIAN. Perhaps she will.

LORD ORKISH. And the old white cat . . .

ADRIAN. What old white cat?

LORD ORKISH. The Countess Willie!

(*The baby begins to fidget.*)

ADRIAN (*wheeling the pram about*). S-s-sh . . . maddening.

LORD ORKISH. I'd like to know what you'll do with him.

ADRIAN. To-morrow he goes to school.

LORD ORKISH. Does he? By George! Well, I always believe in a boy getting used to the world as soon as possible.

ADRIAN. To be duly prepared.

LORD ORKISH. I know of an incomparable little *Lycée* here in Florence. . . . (*Sighing blissfully.*) Incomparable instructors: incomparable boys. Incomparable, incomparable. Everything incomparable.

ADRIAN (*rather doubtfully*). I dare say.

LORD ORKISH. Just the thing.

ERIC. Whereabouts is it, Harry?

LORD ORKISH. Via Canta; a vermilion-gold brick Palace in the very heart of the town!

ADRIAN (*bending over pram with smiling raillery*). We're probably very backward . . . we probably know nothing at all?

(*The baby howls. Re-enter* ANGELO.)

ANGELO. *E pronto il pranzo!*

ADRIAN (*lightly*). You'll stay, *pranz*, Harry?

LORD ORKISH. Thanks.

ADRIAN (*menacingly to baby*). Stop it!

ERIC. And you shall play us each at pills after, what?

ADRIAN. I hope the nuns haven't injured the cloth!

(*The bell rings violently.*)

ERIC (*paralysed*). Oh, my God, . . . if it should be . . .

(*The garden-gate opens slightly — a handful of leaflets falls inside.*)

LORD ORKISH. *Confetti?*

ADRIAN (*relieved*). It's only a circular.

ERIC. I thought it was Enid.

LORD ORKISH (*Optimistically*). I wouldn't worry. So long as the Princess chooses, she'll not leave the Sisterhood, I'll be bound.

ERIC. I sincerely hope you're right.

LORD ORKISH (*Chuckling to himself*). And she'll guard her close, believe me!

ERIC (*to Angelo, who has picked a leaflet up*). What's it all about?

ANGELO (*Thrilling, with exaltation, as though what he read was for him an article of faith*). Oggi: Cynema Reale: grande representazione! . . . Sappho—Gli Amanti di Mytelene.

ADRIAN (*with a gesture of impatience*). Oh, throw it away.

ANGELO (*Perusing still, his whole face alight*). La Bella Courtezan . . . La Pompadour . . . Una Assassina d'Amore . . . La Vita di Londra . . .

ADRIAN (*with the pram moving towards the house, followed by* ERIC *and* LORD ORKISH). By the by, I don't even know my child's name!

ERIC. He gives me the impression rather of *an Hermione* . . .

ADRIAN. Hermione? Nonsense, Eric. He has an air of Claud. Or Gervase even.

ERIC. Gervase?

ADRIAN (*to baby*). Hello, Gervase!

LORD ORKISH (*Prosaically*). His name's Charles.

ADRIAN (*disappointed*). Charles!

LORD ORKISH. Charles Augustus Frederic Humphrey Percy Sydney.

ADRIAN. I intend calling my son *Gervase*.

ERIC. Why not Gerry?

ADRIAN. No; Gervase.

ERIC. Gerry!

[*Exeunt, Gerrying and Gervaseing one another to house.*

ANGELO (*still perusing the leaflet, dawdling, in tones of sheerest ecstasy and joy*). La Pompadour . . . La Vita-Dollar. . . .

Looking like some statue of Verrocheo, he raises his arms yearningly: murmuring: "Dollar!" "Dollar!" "La Vita-Dollar!"

as

THE CURTAIN FALLS ON . . . . . .

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